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The Sacred Ginmill Closes: Heavy Drinking, White Masculinity and the Hard-Boiled Detective in American Culture

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College of William and Mary, davidcamakpratt@gmail.com

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The Sacred Ginmill Closes: Heavy Drinking, White Masculinity and the Hard-Boiled
Detective in American Culture

David Camak Pratt

Wilmette, Illinois

Master of Arts, Bowling Green State University, 2008
Bachelor of Arts, Wittenberg University, 2006

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APPROVAL PAGE

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the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



David Camak Pratt

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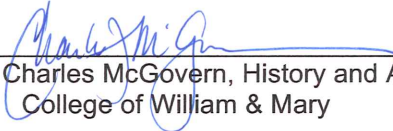


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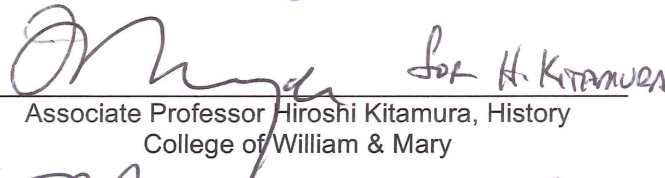
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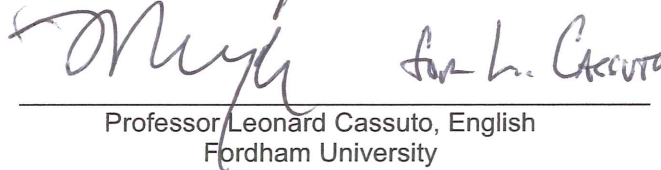


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College of William & Mary

 For H. Kitamura
Associate Professor Hiroshi Kitamura, History
College of William & Mary

 For L. Cassuto
Professor Leonard Cassuto, English
Fordham University

ABSTRACT

Through close readings of fiction, film, and television, “The Sacred Ginmill Closes” provides a cultural history of the heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective in his twentieth-century cultural prime. Emergent in the Prohibition era, hard-boiled fiction comprised a cultural response to both the real and imagined effects of national prohibition. In portraying the Prohibition era’s corrupt and violent public sphere, early hard-boiled fiction by authors like Dashiell Hammett contrasted heavy drinking masculine authority figures, often private detectives, with transgressively greedy and excessively thirsty women whose participation in the public sphere and in masculine behaviors like heavy drinking represented both the cause and ongoing effects of the temperance movement’s culminating legislative success. Having helped to pass a Constitutional amendment, temperance women were perceived not only to have eliminated the saloon, the semi-public space for masculine homosocial conviviality. According to the alcoholic semiotics of hard-boiled detective fiction, women also corrupted the public sphere by infusing that previously masculine sphere with transgressive feminine greed, represented by the excessive alcoholic thirst of the genre’s *femmes fatales*.

The gendered semiotics of heavy drinking in hard-boiled detective fiction outlived the genre’s origins in the Prohibition era. Raymond Chandler’s post-Repeal novels cemented the symbolic role of the alcoholic *femme fatale*, and she and the heavy-drinking detective survived through the post-World War II era despite (and in fact because of) changing ideas about heavy drinking that gained prominence along with the mutual help organization Alcoholics Anonymous. The racial erasures in the genre’s nostalgia for an imagined masculine saloon past were of little consequence for heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity’s continued cultural relevance through the mid-twentieth century.

By the mid-1970s, however, second-wave feminism and new public health concerns about the harm heavy drinkers caused others fundamentally challenged the moral authority of the heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine hero. While heavy-drinking detectives like Lawrence Sanders’ private eye Matthew Scudder grappled with the social harm of which they were capable when drinking, hard-boiled detectives also fought increasingly against masculine serial-killer antagonists rather than the *femmes fatales* that once had been the genre’s very embodiment of corruption and violence. The proliferation of hard-boiled women detectives since the late twentieth century, and especially heavy-drinking women detectives in recent texts like the HBO series *True Detective*, suggest that the gendered alcoholic semiotics of mid-twentieth century hard-boiled detective fiction no longer reflect widely shared ideas about white American masculinity and femininity.

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To Tony and Cliff: constant companions through it all.

Chapter One

Introduction

This dissertation originated with the hypothesis that conventional characters from a few popular culture genres shape Americans' broadly shared ideas about heavy drinking. While these characters are themselves shaped by their authors, of course, generic expectations tend to outlive the cultural visions of individual authors and therefore limit the possibility for changes of convention within a text or over a series of texts. Therefore, if we wish to understand the evolving cultural, social, legal, and even medical consensus on the benefits and dangers of drinking, we must seriously consider the symbolic value attached to fictional characters' drinking in popular culture genres that conventionally include heavy drinking protagonists and/or antagonists. While a number of genres offer viable starting points for such a project, my own research in (primarily) nineteenth- and twentieth-century American texts continually points toward two conventional characters from two mutually constitutive genres: the solitary, heroically masculine, heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective in American crime fiction and film and his foil, the monstrous drunkard who terrorizes the family (often his own) in American Gothic horror fiction and film.

What follows is a cultural history of the former of these two characters, a history bookended by the decline and eventual reemergence, after a fashion, of the latter. Over the long temperance movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the conventional temperance fiction character of the drunkard husband provided a figure with which American women could speak of otherwise unspeakable domestic distress and

violence. With the temperance movement's culminating legislative success and the enactment of national prohibition in 1919 and 1920, the cultural urgency of temperance rhetoric seemed to evaporate. While the literal goal of the temperance movement had been achieved, however, the gender problem signified by alcohol in the Gothic horror of temperance fiction remained unaddressed. Meanwhile, in Prohibition-era American crime fiction the literal problem of corruption and violence in the public sphere found the metaphorical figure of the greedy, ambitious woman, the voracity of whose ambition could be symbolically measured by her alcoholic intake. The *femme fatale* of American hard-boiled crime fiction and film noir outlived national prohibition by generations, the metaphor of public corruption under Prohibition outlasting its specific historical reality. At the same time, whereas heavy-drinking husbands had been the cause of temperance fiction horrors, solitary heavy-drinking detectives became the lonely protectors of moral justice in hard-boiled fiction's urban realms, soaked through with the feminine corruption brought about by Prohibition, which was itself coded as the handiwork of temperance women. Like the genre's *femmes fatales*, the heavy-drinking (rather than alcoholic) detectives of hard-boiled fiction continue to outlive their origins in reaction to the corrupted Prohibition public sphere and the feminine interference in masculine drinking rituals that corruption signified.

By the mid-1970s, amid both a second wave of American feminist political action and a renewed public health emphasis in the alcoholism discourse, the symbolic potency of the *femme fatale* dissipated and the masculine virtue of the heavy-drinking detective began to appear more ambiguous. While variations of both figures continue to play vital roles in American hard-boiled fiction, film, and television, the contrast in relative moral

virtue of heavy-drinking men and ambitious women in genre texts has become less stark, while the moral complexity of the urban settings that once defined the hard-boiled detective's work has largely been replaced by unambiguous evils, often embodied by serial killer antagonists.

The title of this project borrows rather shamelessly from the title of a 1980s hard-boiled novel that is itself quoted from the lyrics of a 1970s folk song. Published in 1986, *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes* is the sixth novel in Lawrence Block's Matthew Scudder detective novel series, and the first in the series after Scudder embraces the identity of an alcoholic and commits to sobriety in *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Before continuing the series with Scudder as a sober hard-boiled detective, as he would with the seventh Scudder novel, Block acknowledges the significance of the hard-boiled detective's heavy drinking by setting Scudder's first post-sobriety novel back in the summer of 1975. "I was still drinking then," Scudder narrates, "and I was at a point where the booze did (or seemed to do) more for me than it did to me."¹ In the first five novels in the series, Scudder drinks in public but alone, or with clients, informants, and occasionally women who will be lovers. In *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes*, on the other hand, Scudder reminisces about his masculine "saloon friends."² Block's choice of "saloon" rather than a more contemporary term like "bar" as a qualifier for "friends" here seems deliberately nostalgic. Shortly after first using the phrase "saloon friends" to describe Skip Devoe and Tommy Tillary, two of the novel's key characters, Scudder explains that one of the bars in his 1975 Manhattan neighborhood was called O'Neal's Baloon because "an old law

¹ Lawrence Block, *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes* (1986; New York: Avon, 1997), 29.

² Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 28.

still on the books that year prohibited calling a place a saloon, and they didn't know that when they ordered the sign, so they changed the first letter and said the hell with it."³

Scudder's anecdote about the origins of O'Neal's Baloon indicates the lingering influence of Prohibition even in 1970s New York City, and his use of the phrase "saloon friends" reiterates the foundational nostalgia for an imagined homosocial convivial past in American hard-boiled detective fiction. From Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*, widely considered the first published hard-boiled detective novel, through Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer series, women whose alcoholic thirst signifies transgressive ambition and greed interfere, often lethally, in masculine homosocial friendship and conviviality, an ideal embodied by the simulacrum of the saloon as an all-male public drinking space.

Whereas a heavy-drinking detective like Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe genuinely longs for the homosocial bonds that he finds impossible to form in the feminized, corrupted urban spaces of modernity, Block effectively eulogizes heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine nostalgia in *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes*. When Scudder first uses the phrase "saloon friends," he does so to turn saloon nostalgia on its head. "Were they friends of mine?" Scudders asks himself of Skip Devoe and Tommy Tillary. "They were, but with a qualification. They were saloon friends. I rarely saw them—or anyone else, in those days—other than in a room where strangers gathered to drink liquor."⁴ Scudder's inference here is a common one made by alcoholics in recovery: friendships formed on the basis of shared alcoholic intoxication lack meaningful depth. Over the course of the novel, Block illustrates this concept in the terms

³ Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 31.

⁴ Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 28-29.

of hard-boiled detective fiction. From the outset, Tommy Tillary is an obvious “saloon friend” according to Scudder’s definition of the phrase. “He was acceptable company,” Scudder says, but goes on to describe how annoyingly gregarious Tommy could be. “He was a little too friendly, a little too indiscriminately friendly, and sometimes there was a chill in his eyes that belied the friendship in his voice.”⁵ When Tommy’s wife is murdered during a burglary, Scudder is unenthusiastic about helping him investigate the two men who appear to be responsible. When Scudder finally determines that Tommy is probably the murderer himself, the detective has no qualms about meting out delayed justice by framing Tommy for the murder of Caroline Cheatham, Tommy’s mistress who kills herself when Tommy abandons her.

While Tommy is an obvious “saloon friend” rather than the kind of stout masculine convivial companion for whom Philip Marlowe or Mike Hammer longs, Block juxtaposes Tommy’s friendship with Scudder, based mostly on proximity, with the story of Skip Devoe and his friend since childhood, Bobby Ruslander. Scudder compares Tommy and Skip thus: “Tommy Tillary got called Tough Tommy, and had a certain tough-guy quality to his manner. Skip Devoe actually *was* tough, but you had to sense it underneath the surface. It wasn’t on display.”⁶ While Tommy is a mere approximation of the masculine convivial hard-boiled ideal, to Scudder’s jaundiced detective’s eye, Skip is the real thing. Whereas Tommy does emotional and physical violence to both his wife and mistress, Skip is generally uninterested in feminine companionship. “He rarely had trouble finding a girl to go home with when he wanted one. But he was living alone and

⁵ Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 37.

⁶ Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 38.

not keeping steady company with anyone, and seemed to prefer the regular company of other men. He had either lived with or been married to someone and it had ended a few years ago, and he seemed disinclined to get involved with anyone else.”⁷

This description of Skip’s hard-boiled desire for convivial homosocial companionship dovetails with the lyrics of “Last Call” by Dave Van Ronk, the folk song from which Block borrows the novel’s title and with which Scudder becomes preoccupied after a bartender friend plays Van Ronk’s record for him. Block quotes the final stanza of lyrics when Scudder first hears, and is entranced by, the song:

“And so we’ll drink the final toast

That never can be spoken:

Here’s to the heart that is wise enough

*To know when it’s better off broken”*⁸

Read in terms of hard-boiled fiction’s gender dynamics, these lyrics read as if they (sadly) acknowledge the wisdom of Skip’s and Scudder’s lifestyles: disappointed in their relationships with women, these hard-boiled men each retreat to a heavy-drinking solitary existence, hoping in the absence of romantic heterosexual love for convivial homosocial friendship.

Skip is content through most of the novel with his heavy-drinking hard-boiled life, having as a steadfast companion his childhood friend Bobby Ruslander. However, late in the novel Scudder discovers and reluctantly tells Skip that Bobby helped orchestrate the robbery and ransom of the financial records in Skip’s bar. Skip, in turn,

⁷ Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 38.

⁸ Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 173.

gives Bobby's name to Tim Pat Morrissey, the vengeful owner of another bar Bobby helped rob. After telling as much to Scudder, Skip tearfully adds, "I loved the man.... I thought, I thought he loved me.... From here on in...I don't love nobody."⁹ In Scudder's memory of his drinking days, even the deepest bonds between saloon friends are illusory. At the outset of *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes*, it appears that Skip Devoe has already resigned himself to a brokenhearted life. By the end, however, he finds that even the seemingly uncomplicated bonds between masculine drinking companions can be heartrending.

At the outset of Block's hard-boiled novel series, it appears that Matthew Scudder is committed to a solitary drinking life absent of potentially heartbreaking connections with others, believing in a "heart that is wise enough / To know when it's better off broken." By the sixth novel in the series, it is a slightly different idea about drinking, also expressed in Dave Van Ronk's "Last Call," that speaks most loudly to Scudder: "I walked home with the song's phrases echoing in my mind, coming back at me in fragments. 'If I'd been drunk when I was born I'd be ignorant of sorrow.' Jesus."¹⁰ While relating loneliness and unhappiness to the desire to drink, just like the final stanza of the song, the lyrics on which Scudder fixates here also suggest what he, from the vantage of recovery in A. A., now understands about drinking: just as no one is born drunk, no one can stay drunk forever. The sacred ginmill closes.

The next five chapters constitute a history of American crime stories in the twentieth century, in which hard-boiled narratives first valorize masculine saloon

⁹ Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 346.

¹⁰ Block, *Sacred Ginmill Closes*, 175.

friendship but only a half century later (equivocally and somewhat heartbrokenly) abandon it. First, however, some context for this cultural history of the heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine hero is necessary.

The Hard-Boiled Detective: Masculine Moralism in a World without Conviviality

Of all the types of heavy drinking protagonists in American literature and popular culture, the hard-boiled detective is the most clearly heroic. Unlike previous scholars of this genre, I do not identify the hard-boiled detective as a morally ambiguous character per se. Rather, I argue that the hard-boiled detective embodies his or her¹¹ author's argument for a morality customized to the priority concerns (or fears, as the case may be) of contemporary American society. In part, the detective embodies this moral argument in his observations of and actions against characters that represent or enact both historically stable American moral wrongs (most of all murder) and historically contingent moral outrages (or panics, as the case may be).

However, because the hard-boiled detective performs his work in a corrupt, immoral or amoral setting, he must be ethically flexible but not so morally pliable as to lose appeal for his audience. Therefore, the hard-boiled detective himself embodies not only long-established American virtues but also vices of historically fluid morality that, in the author's time and the detective's specific context, the audience could be expected to forgive or even applaud in a fictional hero, and possibly admire in living Americans as well. The hard-boiled detective, in other words, is not so much a morally ambiguous

¹¹ Because the great majority of hard-boiled detectives in American fiction through the 1970s are male, with few exceptions I use male pronouns when describing the hard-boiled detective as a general character type.

character as he is a moral realist, dealing in (what appear to him as) hard truths even if he aspires to moral ideals.

Because heavy drinking is an activity of particular legal and moral fluidity across American history, the frequency and manner in which hard-boiled detectives drink serves as a barometer of changing moral, medical, and legal proscriptions regarding alcohol. Furthermore, as a character who regularly ignores petty laws and lesser moral taboos, the heavy-drinking detective suggests a great deal about his readers' unofficial attitudes and fantasies about heavy drinking. As cultural signs, alcohol and heavy drinking also signify meanings in hard-boiled fiction that have little to do with alcohol directly, but much to do with the characters and settings that define the moral worlds of hard-boiled fiction in relation to American culture in the detective's time.

As a masculine hero originating in the Prohibition era, the hard-boiled detective's individualistic moral character is defined in part, ironically, by an ideal of intoxicated conviviality to which he aspires but which he rarely experiences. Dashiell Hammett renders the Prohibition-era decline of all-male public drinking places metaphorically, in the figures of women who use alcohol to interfere with and manipulate his private eye protagonists. Raymond Chandler, in his two novels published during the Depression, likewise renders alcohol use in terms of transgressively greedy femininity or masculine warrior authenticity, his hero Philip Marlowe rejecting the former and identifying with the latter. The hegemony of the disease model of alcoholism after World War II coincided with more frequent portrayals of out-of-control male drinking in novels by Chandler and Ross Macdonald, though these too are presented in gendered terms of middle-class masculine failure or marital misery.

In the chapters that follow, I elaborate on this semiotic history of alcohol in hard-boiled detective fiction and visual culture from the Prohibition era through the cultural and political counterrevolutions of the late 1970s and 1980s. Particularly as a result of the moral realignments of the new temperance movement and second wave feminism, hard-boiled detectives of the Carter-Reagan era were among the first of the genre to acknowledge their drinking as a problem or quit, the moral value of their independent masculinity assigned low priority by a renewed narrative focus on the family in hard-boiled detective fiction and the many popular culture texts that borrow its conventions of character.

Modernity and Moral Disorder: The Origins and Character of The Heavy-Drinking Detective

An American creation of the nineteenth century, the fictional detective was born as a hero capable of navigating an exponentially complex modern world. As such, he (and increasingly she) has adapted over time to meet the demands of evolving underworlds and urban milieus. The detective fiction genre begins with Edgar Allan Poe, whose Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin solved the three mysteries into which he was written through exceptional (arguably superhuman) powers of observation and analysis. Poe set the first Dupin mystery, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), in Paris, “the epitome of the nineteenth-century modern metropolis,” according to Stephen Rachmann. “With London, Paris was one of the first to establish a police force, and Poe connects his tales to the rise of urban life, which began to require institutions of policing and surveillance. By making the prefect of police a foil for the great detective, Poe connects the detective’s

plight with the growing sense that these police forces, generally manned by working-class men, were perceived as inadequate to the mysteries of the great city.”¹² From the outset, the fictional detective operated outside official power structures to restore order amid the new chaos of modernity. Beyond his exceptional powers of ratiocination, however, Dupin was not a fully-fleshed heroic character. Poe’s British successor Arthur Conan Doyle would add human detail to Poe’s framework for the educated, upper-class Victorian detective to create Sherlock Holmes, detective fiction’s first (and most) enduring single character.

As Benjamin O’Dell argues, an important aspect of Holmes’s character as a quirky outsider, to polite society as well as Scotland Yard, is his occasional use of cocaine as a means of distraction. “By removing himself to the social periphery through drug use, Holmes suggests that he is able to explore the world’s peculiarities with detached pleasure, coming in contact with institutional authority only when necessary and avoiding a personal stake in his work.... Holmes’s deviation from acceptable social norms is intentional.”¹³ Writing at a time when upper- and middle-class use of cocaine and morphine was receiving unprecedented scrutiny,¹⁴ Conan Doyle exploited the new taboo in his Sherlock Holmes narratives to identify his protagonist as a social rule-breaker but not a true deviant. It is only because the hero stands outside the status quo that he “appears to champion not the status quo, but a higher or finer code of justice than

¹² Stephen Rachman, “Poe and the Origins of Detective Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. Catherine Ross Nickerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 19.

¹³ Benjamin D. O’Dell, “Performing the Imperial Abject: The Ethics of Cocaine in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 5 (2012): 987-88, doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5931.2012.00969.x.

¹⁴ O’Dell, “Performing the Imperial Abject,” 985.

that insured by official law.... He is far more often the ‘enforcer of standards of decency’ than the imposer of legal sanctions; indeed, he often breaks the law in the service of fair play.”¹⁵

Nonetheless, as Rosemary Jann goes on to explain, in Sherlock Holmes’s late Victorian and Edwardian London, fair play ultimately favored the interests of the upper classes over the lower-class threats of the metropolis.¹⁶ Holmes’s class sympathies are reflected in the class associations of his chosen vice. On the other hand, heavy drinking, the far less exotic vice of Prohibition-era American detectives, signifies their understanding of a moral code unencumbered by the confused, corrupt rules set by those with money and power. These hard-boiled detectives are populist heroes whose ability to navigate the moral murk of the American metropolis is made immediately clear by their thorough disregard of Prohibition. Richard Filloy offers an explanation of this alcoholic symbolism in the work of Dashiell Hammett, the first master of the hard-boiled genre:

All of Hammett’s detectives are heavy drinkers, and drinking plays a role in virtually all of his stories. Except for the last of Hammett’s novels, *The Thin Man*, all of his well-known writing appeared during Prohibition.¹⁷ The combination of Prohibition and the easy acceptance of drink by Hammett’s heroes is itself among the clearest markers of moral ambiguity. The detectives all work on the right side of the cases in which they find themselves, and they are generally aligned with the

¹⁵ Rosemary Jann, “Sherlock Holmes Codes the Social Body,” *ELH* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 703, doi: 10.2307/2873238.

¹⁶ Jann, “Sherlock Holmes,” 703-05.

¹⁷ Filloy makes far too much of the fact that *The Thin Man* was published, in book form, in 1934. Hammett wrote the book during Prohibition, and since his characters frequent many “speakeasies” but no bars, Prohibition is clearly the era in which it takes place.

forces of good, but they are not perfect. Moreover, their work coarsens them and brings them into contact with and some acceptance of such vices as prostitution, gambling, drug use, and smuggling. They are not troubled by the niceties of the law; nor, in such a corrupt world, do they object to using unsavory means to achieve a useful end. They are pragmatists. During Prohibition these attitudes could be readily and conventionally signaled by drinking.... So long as drinking was illegal, there could hardly be a neater, clearer way of marking moral ambiguity.¹⁸

While Filloy's understanding of the use of alcohol by Hammett's detectives is generally apt, Filloy himself somewhat misapplies the phrase "moral ambiguity" in the quotation above, obscuring the reasons for the hard-boiled detective's broad appeal. As Raymond Chandler describes, Hammett's heroes are appealing not because they are morally ambiguous, but in fact because they are the most effective enforcers of morality in urban worlds that are morally ambiguous or worse.

A Hammett detective "must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world,"¹⁹ including "a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket."²⁰ Chandler, whose literary reputation as the creator of the knight-like, heavy-drinking detective Philip Marlowe arguably exceeds Hammett's, elaborates on the character of the hard-boiled detective:

¹⁸ Richard A. Filloy, "Of Drink and Detectives: The Genesis and Function of a Literary Convention," *Contemporary Drug Problems* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 254-55, <http://heinonline.org.proxy.wm.edu/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/condp13&collection=journals&page=249#261>.

¹⁹ Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," in *Later Novels and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1995), 977-92.

²⁰ Chandler, "Simple Art of Murder," 991.

down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be...a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it.... if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people.... He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in.²¹

In short, while what Chandler refers to as “Golden Age” detective fiction elaborates upon the puzzle-plots of Poe’s Dupin stories, hard-boiled detective fiction fleshes out the character of the detective as a moral navigator of modernity’s underbelly. The mysteries of the modern metropolis require the hard-boiled detective to be intimately knowledgeable of and invested in the city’s “mean streets,” rather than capable of detached, disinterested deduction.

The works of Agatha Christie and other Golden Age writers continue to entice readers. However, Chandler’s argument against Golden Age detective fiction and in favor of what he considered the realism of hard-boiled detective fiction has been vindicated by the hard-boiled subgenre’s perseverance and adaptability. Whereas Golden Age-styled

²¹ Ibid., 991-92.

whodunit puzzlers, like the BBC *Poirot* series (1989-2014) or the comedy film *Clue* (1985), tend to have nostalgic appeal, contemporary takes on the hard-boiled genre like HBO's *The Wire* (2002-2008) or *Bored to Death* (2009-2011) appear innovative despite perpetuating familiar generic conventions.

In part, the evergreen quality of the hard-boiled detective genre is less a result of the detective's appeal as a character himself and more a result of what audiences witness through the eyes of that character as a moral guide through American anxieties at any given time. Ross Macdonald, often considered the chronological third in the trinity of genre innovators after Hammett and Chandler, once told a mentee: "The detective isn't your main character, and neither is your villain. The main character is the corpse. The detective's job is to seek justice for the corpse. It's the corpse's story, first and foremost."²² Macdonald's advice, like Chandler's description above, suggests that the detective's character and cultural work are determined by the fears of potential readers at a given time. The detective is defined by his recognition of and opposition to characters and settings that create those fears by creating corpses. Lee Horsley compares crime fiction to satire in this regard: "Satirists write to lash the crimes and vices of their own age, and just as their agendas alter with the times so do those of the socially or politically alert crime writers. The nature of the crimes, the forces impinging on the protagonist and the injustices and prejudices underlying the narrative all change markedly from decade to

²² Frederick Zackel. "'Have You Ever Thought About Doing Something Serious, Like...Detective Fiction?' A Ross Macdonald Protégé Looks Back Fondly on His Mentor," Features, *January Magazine*, April 1999, <http://www.januarymagazine.com/features/zackel.html>.

decade.”²³ I add only that a crime writer need not be especially alert to politics or social issues for that writer’s work to reflect the anxieties or moral priorities of its age. Liberal or conservative, violent or contemplative, the hard-boiled detective is whatever kind of person he needs to be to address, inasmuch as any one person can, modern society’s moral and mortal wrongs in his time.

At the same time, and though the two character types are generically related, the hard-boiled detective is not a superhero. He is a flawed human being, hardened by his unjust world. For the detective to be anything else would detract from the seeming realism of the genre, making the hero no more believable or trustworthy than the politicians who often serve as his villains. Unlike those villains, the detective cannot be flawed in ways that identify him with the root problems of his setting; he must be sympathetic to an audience trusting him as a moral curator of contemporary society. Therefore, while the hard-boiled detective defines the greatest problems or fears of his time in juxtaposition to villains, victims, and dangerous settings, the detective’s own vices and character flaws suggest the moral issues that audiences consider relatively unimportant or perhaps wish to dismiss entirely.

Considered from this perspective, the persistence and consistency of heavy drinking as a character trait of hard-boiled detectives appear to be more than simply a vestige of the historical moment in which the genre came of age, as Filloy aptly argues it is not. However, it is also not simply the signifier and symptom of the detective’s moral ambiguity in juxtaposition to the post-Prohibition cultural hegemony of the disease model

²³ Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 159.

of alcoholism, as Filloy argues it is. Rather, I argue that hard-boiled detectives' heavy drinking reflects readers' fantasies and anxieties not only about alcohol and/or drug use itself, but also and more importantly those shifting cultural fantasies and anxieties about gender, class, and race which alcohol has signified throughout American history. The hard-boiled detective's drinking habits and attitudes change over time, relative to the weight readers and viewers are likely to lend alcoholism as a social concern as well as the weight American cultural consumers may give to broad social problems versus individual personal concerns. Consequently, detective fiction reveals much about the manner in which popular thinking about alcohol as a health and public safety concern changes according to social and cultural, rather than strictly medical or legal, trends. Additionally, as a character through whom readers can realize heroic fantasies vicariously, the hard-boiled detective suggests drinking-related attitudes and desires that many Americans may share in common but that may not be reflected by the law or other official public discourse. Lastly, and importantly for any discussion of alcohol in fiction, depictions of heavy drinking in literature and popular culture carry many associations only related by culture to the activity itself. These symbolic connotations are central to hard-boiled detective fiction, in which details of character and setting create a mood of moral decay that is often emphasized more than specific crimes or other plot elements.

The Heavy Drinking Detective in His Time

The five chapters that follow relate a cultural history of the heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective as a figure of white masculine moral virtue in the prime of his cultural hegemony. From the Prohibition era through the early years of the Carter-Reagan era, the

heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective drank in defiance of the earlier temperance culture that foregrounded the characterization of heavy-drinking masculinity as a monstrosity terrorizing the American family. By the late 1970s, the Gothic temperance villain and the hard-boiled hero began imperfectly to blend in American crime fiction. Monstrous masculine serial killers supplanted the *femmes fatales* and atmospheric corruption that defined earlier hard-boiled fiction, while heavy drinking threatened to undermine rather than signify the hard-boiled detective's masculine moral authority.

Chapter 2 begins this history of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity with a close reading of *Red Harvest* (1929), Dashiell Hammett's first published novel, widely considered the first hard-boiled detective novel ever. Scholars have debated the Marxist pedigree of this novel set in Personville, a mining town overrun with criminals first brought in to quell a labor strike. However, I argue that, by reading *Red Harvest* as a text with overt political intent rather than as a cultural product of its political moment, scholars have failed to recognize the striking parallels between the work of Hammett's nameless detective, the Continental Op, in fictional Personville and the real-world bloodshed in America that resulted from attempts by government, criminal, and vigilante forces to enforce order in the thoroughly corrupted Prohibition public sphere. Men commit all the substantial violence in Personville during the Continental Op's ultimately fruitless attempt to wipe the criminal element out of Personville (alias "Poisonville"). However, the financially ambitious, heavy drinking, incompletely feminine but nonetheless alluring Dinah Brand is not only the Continental Op's most steadfast drinking companion in Personville. She is also the personification of the corrupting

feminine influence of Prohibition in Poisonville and therefore a character prototype for the hard-boiled detective genre's more actively lethal *femmes fatales* to come.

In chapter 3, I examine the broad range of drinking behaviors among the men and women who populate Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles in *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940). Chandler's second novel is so filled with detective Philip Marlowe's judgments of others' drinking habits that the novel practically serves as a Rosetta stone for understanding the semiotic function of alcohol in hard-boiled detective fiction. Building on the juxtaposition of elderly, bloodless General Sternwood and his vampiric young daughters in *The Big Sleep* (1939), *Farewell, My Lovely* firmly establishes Marlowe's understanding of corrupt urban modernity as the fault of greedy, ambitious, and excessively thirsty women. Marlowe only forms honest masculine bonds in fleeting moments before women, inevitably, interfere. Indeed, women like Helen Grayle have so thoroughly depleted the warrior vitality of American masculinity that the best men in Marlowe's world are more often than not criminals, sometimes even murderers like Moose Malloy. According to Chandler's alcoholic semiotics, feminine corruption of the masculine public sphere is so thorough that men, no matter how virtuous their intentions, have no choice but to play by women's rules and engage in vice.

In chapter 4, I argue that Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), while not itself a hard-boiled detective novel per se, served a biting critique of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity's racial prejudice (if not misogyny) even as Chandler perhaps unwittingly hardened that racial divide in his contemporary novels. While hard-boiled novels like *Farewell, My Lovely* often feature the conventional scene of the white hard-boiled hero successfully navigating the unfamiliar social space of a black bar, I argue that Jan Erlone

and Mary Dalton's night of eating and drinking at a South Side Chicago restaurant with Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* points to the racial limits of convivial drinking in hard-boiled fiction. Narrating Bigger's attempt to use alcohol to avoid feeling the presence of his white companions, Richard Wright reveals that Jan and Mary's attempt to use alcohol for the opposite purpose of interracial conviviality only makes Bigger ever more double-consciously aware of his black skin. In turn, the fixation of the white men investigating Mary's death on the fact that Bigger and Mary got drunk on the night of her death points toward a further racial complication of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity. Because of persistent racist images in American culture of drunken black men, particularly as sexual predators of white women, alcohol does not signify the same masculine moral authority for black hard-boiled detectives as it does for white detectives, even in novels by prominent black authors like Chester Himes and Walter Mosley.

Although many popular ideas about what constitutes heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity come from American film, hard-boiled crime fiction adapted somewhat belatedly to the screen, gaining prominence in the 1940s and '50s in the genre that has come to be known as film noir. By that time, public discourse regarding alcohol had moved beyond the wet-versus-dry debates of the Prohibition era to emphasize instead the distinction between healthy, normal drinking and the disease of alcoholism, a distinction institutionalized by the mutual help group Alcoholics Anonymous. While anxiety over the distinction between heavy drinking and alcoholism manifested in some midcentury hard-boiled detective narratives, the disease model of alcoholism did not fundamentally challenge the semiotics of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity. As long as alcoholism appeared to be a disease afflicting men more or less at random, heavy drinking could as

easily signify masculine moral virtue as it could masculine illness. In chapter 5, I argue that midcentury films about alcoholism like *The Lost Weekend* (1945) constitute a film noir subgenre that bolsters the semiotics of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity by portraying alcoholism as a disease suffered by middle-class white men for which the most effective treatment is feminine understanding and nurturance. To illustrate not only the role of alcoholism films in the gendered semiotics of film noir, but also the change in those semiotics over the second half of the twentieth century, I further argue that the neo-noir alcoholism film *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995) serves as a meta-critique of its own genre. By portraying alcoholism as a literal, terminal disease afflicting writer Ben Sanderson, the film in turn portrays the selfless feminine dedication of his prostitute companion, Sera, as not only self-destructive but also completely without value for Ben.

I begin chapter 6 by using the CBS sitcom *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983) as an example of the cultural influence of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity beyond American crime fiction. I argue that Hawkeye Pierce, the heavy-drinking Army surgeon who is the show's moral center, and Margaret "Hot Lips" Houlihan, his power-hungry, rule-mongering *femme fatale* foil, translate the central gender conflict of hard-boiled detective fiction to the often-serious sitcom's Korean War setting. Having established the hard-boiled nature of *M*A*S*H*'s structuring gender dynamic, I juxtapose the sitcom with Lawrence Sanders' Matthew Scudder novels, a more obvious contemporary example of the hard-boiled genre, to demonstrate how heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity changed alongside second-wave feminism and the new temperance movement. In the later of *M*A*S*H*'s eleven seasons, Hawkeye trades his early misogyny for feminist rhetoric as Margaret becomes his moral equal rather than a mortal threat to his masculine

independence. Hawkeye's identity as the show's lone-wolf masculine hero likewise fades as his heavy drinking becomes less carefree and more anxious. While *M*A*S*H*'s anti-authoritarian masculine hero is thus humbled, Lawrence Sanders' loner private eye Matthew Scudder similarly finds that he cannot drink away his obligations to the flawed and corrupt institutions of American society against which the fictional private detective first emerged as a hero. Over the first five novels in Sanders' series, in the face of increasing evidence of his own moral failings while drunk as well as increasingly monstrous masculine threats to his clients, Scudder commits to a new, sober moral certainty guided by a simplified moral code in the face of unambiguous mortal threats.

By way of conclusion, in chapter 7 I consider recent popular texts that feature heavy-drinking women investigators, with a particular focus on the character Ani Bezzerides of the HBO series *True Detective*. A number of popular woman-authored hard-boiled novel series featuring women detectives began publication around the time that I conclude this history of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity's cultural hegemony. However, hard-boiled women have, until recently, been much less inclined to drink than their male counterparts. I consider what recent heavy-drinking women detectives might tell us about the present state of the gender conflicts which have so long defined the alcoholic semiotics of both American Gothic horror and hard-boiled crime fiction.

Chapter Two

“She Voted for King George”: Prohibition and the Corrupted Public Sphere in Dashiell

Hammett’s *Red Harvest*

Jack London begins *John Barleycorn*, his “alcoholic memoirs” published in 1913, by detailing an election day exchange between himself and his wife, Charmian, about why he has voted for women’s suffrage. “When the women get the ballot, they will vote for prohibition,” London explains. “It is the wives, and sisters, and mothers, and they only, who will drive the nails into the coffin of John Barleycorn.”¹ When Charmian counters that London has seemed to be “a friend to John Barleycorn,” the author’s explanation is lengthy, complicated and contradictory.

“I am. I was. I am not. I never am. I am never less his friend than when he is with me and when I seem most his friend. He is the king of liars. He is the frankest truth-sayer. He is the august companion with whom one walks with the gods. He is also in league with the Noseless One. His way leads to truth naked, and to death. He gives clear vision, and muddy dreams. He is the enemy of life, and the teacher of wisdom beyond life’s vision. He is a red-handed killer, and he slays youth.”²

¹ Jack London, *John Barleycorn* (1913; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

² London, *John Barleycorn*, 2.

As Daniel Okrent puts it in *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, Jack London “wanted the suffragists to vote him into sobriety,”³ thereby ending his and other American men’s torturous relationship with alcohol.

In London’s world, it is only men who know John Barleycorn, while women represent John Barleycorn’s opposite and enemy. “I reminded Charmian of the canoe-houses from which she had been barred in the South Pacific, where the kinky-haired cannibals escaped from their womenkind and feasted and drank by themselves, the sacred precincts taboo to women under pain of death.” London seems to include this description of “cannibal” islanders as an almost sociobiological argument for the apparent masculinity of drinking in his own culture, which he then describes. “As a youth, by way of the saloon I had escaped from the narrowness of women’s influence into the wide free world of men. All ways led to the saloon. The thousand roads of romance and adventure drew together in the saloon, and thence led out and on over the world.”⁴ Like many advocates of prohibition in his time, Jack London believed that making alcohol illegal would simply close the saloon and force young men to find other, nonalcoholic entryways onto the roads of romance and adventure.

While the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act did effectively shutter the all-male drinking space of the saloon, they did not rid America of the complications that London identifies in his long, unhappy relationship with John Barleycorn. In fact, Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest* (1929), the first-ever novel of the hard-boiled detective fiction genre, in which a legally dry society is soaked through with the spirit of John

³ Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 63.

⁴ London, *John Barleycorn*, 3.

Barleycorn, can be read as a Prohibition-era rebuttal to Jack London's vision of a post-saloon America. In *Red Harvest*, the corrupted society of the allegorical anytown Personville (alias "Poisonville") embodies all the contradictions and false promises that London identifies in his relationship with alcohol. In an America where even the brand names on whiskey bottles are counterfeit, capitalistic self-interest pervades and ultimately negates all human relationships. Rather than bringing men out from under John Barleycorn's addictive influence, enfranchised women in Hammett's novel themselves come under the poisonous influence of the capitalist public sphere. Having voted the intoxicating male social space of the saloon out of existence, the women of Personville now embody the toxicity that has spilled out of the saloon doors to pervade the mixed-gender, capitalist American public sphere. Whereas Jack London, and the women he imagines voting for prohibition, treated the saloon as a metonym for myriad American social issues, Hammett employs *Red Harvest's* one major female character as a metonym for the corruption that Prohibition engendered and the counterfeit liquor that fuels Poisonville as a metonym for the unfulfilled democratic promises of progressive reform.

Red Harvest is the first of Hammett's novels to feature the Continental Op, the nameless detective Hammett had been developing since 1923 in stories published in the legendary pulp magazine *Black Mask*.⁵ In the novel, the Op travels to the mining town of Personville to meet with newspaper publisher Donald Willsson, who is killed while the Op waits for him at Willsson's home. After this murder, the Op learns that Donald's father, Elihu Willsson,

⁵ Robert L. Gale, *A Dashiell Hammett Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000), 9.

owned Personville, heart, soul, skin and guts. He was president and majority stockholder of the Personville Mining Corporation, ditto of the First National Bank, owner of the *Morning Herald*, and *Evening Herald*, the city's only newspapers, and at least part owner of nearly every other enterprise of any importance. Along with these pieces of property he owned a United States senator, a couple of representatives, the governor, the mayor, and most of the state legislature. Elihu Willsson was Personville, and he was almost the whole state.⁶

Despite his apparent capitalistic omnipotence, old Elihu's power has been compromised by the criminals he hired to help break a labor strike in 1921, who then decided never to leave Personville. When one of those criminals' henchmen confronts Elihu Willsson in his bedroom the night after his son's murder, Willsson hires the Op "to clean up this pigsty of a Poisonville for me, to smoke out the rats, little and big."⁷ Over the course of the novel, the Op accomplishes his task by pitting the city's gangsters against each other so that they rid the city of one another. By the time his work is through, Personville is under martial law. Though the Continental Op would have preferred to take Willsson down with his hired thugs, he ultimately assures old Elihu that "you'll have your city back, all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again."⁸

Just as Hammett leaves the Op nameless for his entire career, the summary above gives an accurate account of *Red Harvest*'s story without any mention of its most central character: Dinah Brand. A bank cashier's love for Dinah leads to the early solution of the mystery of Donald Willsson's death, and Dinah's own death is the novel's final and most

⁶ Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* (1929; New York: Vintage, 1992), 8.

⁷ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 42.

⁸ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 203.

compelling mystery. In between, she and the Op cultivate a friendship in the eye of the hurricane of violence they have stirred up together.

Robert Albury, the cashier who murders Donald Willsson out of misdirected jealousy as Dinah's one-time lover, is the first to describe her at length to the Op:

"I suppose you'll see her. You'll be disappointed at first. Then, without being able to say how or when it happened, you'll find you've forgotten your disappointment, and the first thing you know you'll be telling her your life's history, and all your troubles and hopes.... And then you're caught, absolutely caught.... She's money-mad, all right, but somehow you don't mind it. She's so thoroughly mercenary, so frankly greedy, that there's nothing disagreeable about it. You'll understand what I mean when you know her."⁹

If Elihu Willsson is Personville's most powerful capitalist, Dinah Brand is capitalism itself, or as Sean McCann describes her, "a nearly literal figure of an untamable, speculative market."¹⁰ At various times, practically all the men in Personville have been as invested in Dinah Brand as Albury describes from his own experience, from the town's capitalist king Elihu Willsson down to its local labor leader, Bill Quint, with whom she no longer has ties because he "threatened to kill her."¹¹

In one sense, Dinah Brand clearly fits the mold of the *femme fatale*: men's desire for Dinah leads them to kill others or bring harm to themselves. However, unlike a temptress from a Raymond Chandler novel, for instance, she is not guilty of any

⁹ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 27.

¹⁰ Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 110.

¹¹ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 28.

particular wrongdoing, only a general, free-ranging greed. As Albury describes her, she is not calculating and manipulative but instead totally frank and forthright about what she expects to gain from her relationships with men. With the exception of Albury's, Dan Rolff's, and Elihu Willsson's longings from a distance, there is no clear romantic or sexual aspect to any of Dinah's interactions with men in *Red Harvest*. If she is not quite one of the boys, she is importantly one with the boys.

Put another way, while Dinah may function as a metonym for the attraction of capitalist speculation and financial gain, she is also a fully-fleshed character rather than a projection of the female stereotypes commonly associated with hard-boiled fiction. William Marling describes Dinah as “[b]y far the most interesting and exuberant character in *Red Harvest*. . . . Originally Hammett appears to have intended her as one of those vacuous flappers from Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925). . . . But Hammett gave Dinah such precise, vital details that she outstripped her model.”¹² Indeed, part of the disappointment Albury describes upon first seeing Dinah undoubtedly results from Dinah's failure to contain herself within the mold of femininity. In the Continental Op's oft-quoted words,

She was an inch or two taller than I, which made her about five feet eight. She had a broad-shouldered, full-breasted, round-hipped body and big muscular legs. The hand she gave me was soft, warm, strong. Her face was the face of a girl of twenty-five already showing signs of wear. Little lines crossed the corners of her

¹² William Marling, *The American Roman Noir: Hammett, Cain, and Chandler* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 118.

big ripe mouth. Fainter lines were beginning to make nets around her thick-lashed eyes. They were large eyes, blue and a bit blood-shot.

Her coarse hair—brown—needed trimming and was parted crookedly.

One side of her upper lip had been rouged higher than the other. Her dress was of a particularly unbecoming wine color, and it gaped here and there down one side, where she had neglected to snap the fasteners or they had popped open. There was a run down the front of her left stocking.¹³

The Op's description of Dinah reads like a description of an unconvincing transvestite, which may reflect contemporary attitudes regarding women's suffrage and other forms of female participation in public life.

Beyond her appearance, nothing else signifies Dinah's unique character, and nearly equal footing among the men of Personville, as clearly as her heavy drinking. The Op drinks throughout his tenure in Personville and, aside from a few shared drinks with relatively minor male characters, does it just about exclusively with Dinah (if not alone). In their first meeting, after failing to convince the Op to pay her for information through persuasion alone, Dinah decides that "Maybe he'd loosen up if he had a drink."¹⁴ Over the course of several hours, Dinah and the Op finish an entire bottle of gin together, each with the hope of getting the other drunk enough to share money or information, respectively. The Op leaves with the information he needs and all of his money. However, in their next serious drinking session, the Op offers (with little prodding) to pay Dinah an amount commensurate with the help she is able to provide him in cleaning up

¹³ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 32.

¹⁴ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 35.

Poisonville. He again leaves without actually paying her for new information, but their negotiations continue upon his next visit to Dinah's cottage on Hurricane Street.

Although it is never entirely separable from these negotiations, their relationship is nonetheless the Op's most emotionally significant to develop in Personville. By the latter half of the novel, the shared gin that had been a negotiating tool in their first encounter becomes a tool of genuine social bonding in Dinah and the Op's platonic friendship. However, it becomes horrifyingly clear that their intoxicated convivial bonds cannot survive the deeply corrupt atmosphere of Poisonville when, after falling asleep drunk on gin and laudanum, the Op wakes from a dream to find he is holding the ice pick buried in Dinah's chest.

The Op does not know for sure that he did not kill Dinah until the final page of *Red Harvest*. Poisonville's atmosphere of corruption is so toxic that the Op has very real reason to fear he has been brought under the town's influence. He explains his fear, before Dinah offers him laudanum to quell it, on his last night at her cottage: "It's this damned town. Poisonville is right. It's poisoned me.... I've got hard skin all over what's left of my soul, and after twenty years of messing around with crime I can look at any sort of a murder without seeing anything in it but my bread and butter, the day's work. But this getting a rear out of planning deaths is not natural to me. It's what this place has done to me."¹⁵

But premeditated murder is only the most extreme symptom of Personville's poisoned social body, of which the characters who makes a legitimate living and survive can be counted on one hand. Although in many ways it seems to be a clear indictment of

¹⁵ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 155.

capitalism, scholars have recently debated the relative Marxism of the politics behind *Red Harvest*. Michael Denning argues that, although Dashiell Hammett's written work largely predates the leftist "cultural front" that emerged during the Depression, Hammett nonetheless "in large part established the hard-boiled aesthetic of the Popular Front," the leftist politics of which he himself came to be publicly identified with. Denning specifically claims that *Red Harvest* "was itself a displaced proletarian novel.... The book's red harvest is the blood bath that results, but Hammett's obsessive color allegories suggest that the title not only memorializes the defeated Wobblies but promises a Red harvest."¹⁶ On the other hand, J. A. Zumoff stresses the fact that Hammett did not align himself with the Communist Party until the later 1930s, after his literary career was over. Despite "the tendency to *read* Hammett *backwards*" from this later political activity, *Red Harvest* and "his early stories do not lend themselves to a coherent political reading, much less a radical one.... distinctly conservative, perhaps even reactionary, elements can be found in Hammett's writings of the 1920s.... His writings from the twenties should not be considered 'Marxist.'"¹⁷

While both Denning's and Zumoff's readings have merit, their understandings of the historical context of *Red Harvest* lack specificity, inasmuch as neither sustains attention on the significance of Prohibition in Personville even though bootlegging seems to drive the local economy at least as much as Elihu Willsson's mines. Willsson is not the only evil in Hammett's allegorical mining town, and neither is *Red Harvest* simply a

¹⁶ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd paperback ed. (New York: Verso, 2010), 256.

¹⁷ J. A. Zumoff, "Politics and the 1920s Writings of Dashiell Hammett," *American Studies* 52, no. 1 (2012): 78, doi: 10.1353/ams.2012.0012.

Marxist critique of labor relations in the 1920s. Rather, Personville represents the accelerated corruption, hypocrisy, and violence of America under Prohibition, with the Op's native San Francisco representing a freer, more just society (with better booze, to boot). Indeed, Hammett establishes the setting of Poisonville, a city roaringly drunk on corruption, through a dizzying plot that dramatizes Prohibition's eclipse of meaningful progressive political and social action in the 1920s.

“In almost every respect imaginable,” writes Daniel Okrent, “Prohibition was a failure. It encouraged criminality and institutionalized hypocrisy. It deprived the government of revenue, stripped the gears of the political system, and imposed profound limitations on individual rights. It fostered a culture of bribery, blackmail, and official corruption.”¹⁸ As I assert in the introduction, Prohibition thereby provided the context for the cultural ascendancy of hard-boiled detective fiction, in which convoluted plots that create a pervasive atmosphere of public toxicity replace the soluble mysteries of classic detective fiction. Close reading of the alcoholic imagery in Hammett's fiction reveals the depth of the relationship between Prohibition's failures and early hard-boiled fiction. In *Red Harvest*, the most immediately apparent correlation is the gangsters' threat to the established powers of Personville. As Bill Quint tells the Op after Donald Willsson's murder, “The strongest of ‘em now is probably Pete the Finn. This stuff we're drinking's his. Then there's Lew Yard. He's got a loan shop down on Parker Street, does a lot of bail business, handles most of the burg's hot stuff...and is pretty thick with Noonan, the chief of police. This kid Max Thaler—Whisper—had got a lot of friends too....Gambler. Those three, with Noonan, just about help Elihu run his city—help him more than he

¹⁸ Okrent, *Last Call*, 373.

wants. But he's got to play with them or else—"¹⁹ The Op steers the conversation back to Elihu's murdered son, but Quint's description of the criminal leaders of Personville points the novel away from the late reform-seeking Donald Willsson as well as Quint himself and the mineworkers he once tried to lead in their efforts at labor reform.

For any reading of Hammett's political intent in *Red Harvest*, this change in direction at the end of the book's first chapter is hugely significant. The only time Bill Quint appears after sharing a few drinks of Pete the Finn's "paint" with the Op in the first chapter,²⁰ Quint sneers at the detective and dismisses him as a "gum-shoe."²¹ If Hammett began *Red Harvest* with a story to tell about American labor, he quickly obscures that story in the fog of criminality and corruption created by Poisonville's bootlegger-led gangster collective. Quint foretells the novel's rapidly approaching fog when he says to the Op, "There's more than a few things wrong with everything in this lousy burg."²²

Judged alongside Daniel Okrent's narrative history of Prohibition, the pervasive corruption of Poisonville's public sphere paralleled, without exaggeration, the climate of American cities large and small during the fourteen years of Prohibition. In Philadelphia, a gambler named Max "Boo Boo" Hoff had much more power, as director of the "extraordinarily efficient criminal operation known as the Seventh Street Gang," than his fictional counterpart, Max "Whisper" Thaler. Located near the chemical factories of the Delaware Valley, Philadelphia was the hub of the industrial alcohol racket during Prohibition, and Hoff was that racket's most successful entrepreneur. In the words of

¹⁹ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 10.

²⁰ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 10.

²¹ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 29.

²² Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 10.

Emory Buckner, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York, the industrial alcohol business under Prohibition had become “a perfect carnival of corruption.” As Okrent details, the corruption in Philadelphia, that carnival’s “big top,” was so thick that Mayor W. Freeland Kendrick hired legendary Marine General Smedley Butler as Philadelphia’s director of public safety to clean it up. Despite his military credentials, Butler failed utterly. Boo Boo Hoff “could afford to buy off the head of the police department’s Detective Bureau, hundreds of street cops, and the necessary complement of federal agents.” Hoff’s lawyer was Congressman Benjamin Golder, deeply rooted in Philadelphia’s Republican political machine. Most importantly, Butler was unable to perform the cleansing for which he had been hired because the man who hired him was less than entirely committed to the idea. “Mayor Kendrick refused to allow [Butler] to raid the Ritz-Carlton and Bellevue-Stratford hotels,” where Philadelphia’s commercial elite—including the railroad and banking magnates substantially invested in Hoff’s success—drank.²³

With so many similarities between Butler’s expedition into Philadelphia and the Continental Op’s crusade in Personville, it is tempting to assume that Hammett had a single real-world Prohibition-era setting in mind when creating the fictional Personville. But the story of Prohibition Philadelphia is not unique. Williamson County, Illinois, could as easily have been the inspiration for *Red Harvest* as the city of Philadelphia. In 1923, “dry” congressman Edward E. Denison, who voted consistently in favor of Prohibition enforcement while exploiting his office to avoid it himself,²⁴ convinced the

²³ Okrent, *Last Call*, 202-03.

²⁴ Okrent, *Last Call*, 325.

head of the Prohibition Bureau to deputize twelve to thirteen hundred Klansmen “to clean up the county, which had been in the grip of bootleggers.”²⁵ This vigilante army was led by S. Glenn Young, who had lost his job in the notoriously ineffectual Prohibition Bureau after an investigation into his conduct showed “Agent Young to be not only entirely unfit to be in the government service but a distinct and glaring disgrace to the service.”

Predictably, this man “of a belligerent nature, prone to make threats of violence, unwilling to accept advice and apparently convinced that he is a law within himself,”²⁶ led his army of Klansmen on violent raids of “actual and alleged” bootleggers.²⁷ The biggest of these raids transpired on the night of February 1, 1924, when the vigilantes “raided the homes of immigrant Italian mineworkers, terrorizing women and children, and, if they found wine in the house, hauling their husbands and fathers off to jail.”²⁸ On February 8, Young took control of the local government,²⁹ leading to a battle between Klansmen and “bootlegger-supported local officials” that left twenty people dead.³⁰ Less than two years earlier, a miners’ strike in “Bloody Williamson” had ended with a similar death toll.³¹

If not for antecedents like these, *Red Harvest* might have signaled Hammett’s prescience, given events that took place during the time of its initial publication in novel form. In 1929, seven gangsters died in Chicago’s infamous St. Valentine’s Day Massacre,

²⁵ Okrent, *Last Call*, 245.

²⁶ Angle, Paul M., *Bloody Williamson: A Chapter in American Lawlessness* (New York: Knopf, 1962), 161.

²⁷ Angle, *Bloody Williamson*, 284.

²⁸ Okrent, *Last Call*, 245.

²⁹ Angle, *Bloody Williamson*, 284.

³⁰ Okrent, *Last Call*, 245.

³¹ Angle, *Bloody Williamson*, 277-78.

and gangsters from five cities convened for an Atlantic City “peace conference”—an ironic version of which takes place in *Red Harvest* and leads to the novel’s climactic spree of bloodshed. In his first year in office, President Hoover “briefly considered sending in the army or the marine corps” to remedy the “complete breakdown in Government” in Detroit, where “gun violence had turned the Detroit River,” America’s doorway for Canadian liquor, “into a combat zone.”³² Hoover ultimately did not send troops into Detroit, but he did direct the federal effort to punish America’s most famous gangster.

Hoover’s description in his memoirs of Al Capone’s Chicago reads very much like the Op’s observations of Poisonville: shortly after taking office, Hoover determined “that Chicago was in the hands of gangsters, that the police and magistrates were completely under their control, that the governor of the state was futile, that the federal government was the only force by which the city’s ability to govern itself could be restored. At once I directed that all the Federal agencies concentrate on Mr. Capone and his allies.” The power of “all the Federal agencies,” chiefly the IRS, did prove effective in removing Capone from Chicago, but “To the extent that the Capone operation was at all weakened, rival mobs soon satisfied Chicago’s thirst.”³³ The Op predicts a similar outcome for his cleansing of Poisonville. After seeing to the deaths of Pete the Finn, Lew Yard, Whisper Thaler, and police chief Noonan, he tells Elihu Willsson,

“You’re going to tell the governor that your city police have got out of hand, what with bootleggers sworn in as officers, and so on. You’re going to ask him for

³² Okrent, *Last Call*, 320.

³³ Okrent, *Last Call*, 344-45.

help—the national guard would be best.... There are plenty of busy young men working like hell right now, trying to get into the dead [mobsters'] shoes....

“You’re going to have the mayor, or the governor, whichever it comes under, suspend the whole Personville police department, and let the mail-order troops handle things till you can organize another. I’m told the mayor and the governor are pieces of your property. They’ll do what you tell them. And that’s what you’re going to tell them....

“Then you’ll have your city back, all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again.”³⁴

While both the interventions of the Hoover administration into the violent corruption of American cities and the Op’s dictation that Willsson get the National Guard to intervene in Personville speak to the necessary expansion of federal power to enforce Prohibition, Hammett’s fictionalized account highlights the illusory nature of that expanded power. It may only be “under martial law” that Personville finally begins “developing into a sweet-smelling thornless bed of roses,” as the Op ironically narrates,³⁵ but the National Guard only intervenes because a private detective blackmails Personville’s most powerful capitalist into demanding state intervention. Elihu Willsson may own Personville, but his ownership is so thoroughly based on deceit, corruption, hypocrisy, and criminality that anyone employed by Willsson to help maintain his power becomes a potential threat to that power. Under Prohibition, something other than the old means of production has

³⁴ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 203.

³⁵ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 216.

become the dominant power in Poisonville, rendering the initial conflict between Willsson and his miners invisible.

When *Red Harvest* was first published, Americans widely understood the then-present state of criminality, corruption, and hypocrisy to be the product of Prohibition. The baldly apparent divide between political authority and moral authority was a predictable consequence of the Anti-Saloon League's political pressure tactics, whereby dry laws became the first wedge issue—the antecedent to, for instance, abortion rights.³⁶ Wayne Wheeler, the ASL leader who was instrumental in the passage (and wording) of the Eighteenth Amendment, from the beginning “asked American politicians for public loyalty, not private virtue.”³⁷ As Prohibition's tenure wore on, and its unexpected consequences increased in frequency and magnitude, the private behavior of American politicians increasingly led to public shame. The year 1929 was particularly rife with public airings “of the official venality that had been Prohibition's symbiotic relative since its inception...bringing a fistful of stories exposing the hypocrisy of dry politicians sipping—or guzzling—cocktails while voting to slam [minor offenders] into prison cells.”³⁸ The widening divide between legal and moral authority led Pauline Morton Sabin, “the Wayne Wheeler of Repeal” whose efforts helped expand the scope of women's involvement in American politics generally, to declare Prohibition “an attempt to enthrone hypocrisy as the dominant force in this country.”³⁹

³⁶ Okrent, *Last Call*, 36.

³⁷ Okrent, *Last Call*, 125.

³⁸ Okrent, *Last Call*, 323.

³⁹ Okrent, *Last Call*, 224.

In *Red Harvest*, Elihu Willsson may own Personville, but the poisonous atmosphere of hypocrisy, crime, and corruption produced by Prohibition rules the city like a king. While the Op's futile cleansing of the town's criminal leaders mimics realities of America under Prohibition, the language with which the Op narrates events involving alcohol further ties *Red Harvest's* pervasive atmosphere of deceit and moral fog to the novel's Prohibition context. Specifically, the Op's preoccupation with counterfeit labels on bootleg alcohol indicates his understanding of the deceit underlying promises of relief or reform.

The first instance of the Op's narrating this relatively minor form of Prohibition deceit occurs when the Op joins Noonan and his police force on a raid of the Cedar Hill Inn. Thinking he is closing in on Whisper Thaler, Noonan is horrified when he and his officers crash the door to find that

The first floor was ankle-deep with booze that was still gurgling from bullet holes in the stacked-up cases and barrels that filled most of the house.

Dizzy with the fumes of spilled hooch, we waded around until we had found four dead bodies and no live ones. The four were swarthy foreign-looking men in laborers' clothes. Two of them were practically shot to pieces....

We went out gladly, though I did hesitate long enough to pocket an unbroken bottle labeled *Dewar*.⁴⁰

What the police thought was Whisper's hideout turns out to be a warehouse of Pete the Finn's bootleg alcohol, at least some of which falsely claims to be Dewar's Scotch whiskey.

⁴⁰ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 123.

Hammett's inclusion of this detail is, first of all, indicative of the moment in American history when he was writing *Red Harvest*. "In the saloon era," explains Okrent, "calling for liquor by brand name was almost unheard of; in the speakeasy era, it became a habit, first as a means of protecting oneself from alcohol of questionable origin, and secondarily as a way of expressing one's level of taste." Even so, given the unregulated Prohibition liquor market, there were no guarantees that a brand name indicated quality, or even safety. "There were exceptions, of course, but in too many places, if you ordered Brand X, you got Brand X; if you ordered Dewar's or Gordon's, you paid twice as much—and got Brand X."⁴¹

Hammett's description of counterfeit "*Dewar*" specifically amplifies the imagery of the Op's pocketed bottle of liquor. From the brand's beginning, Dewar's has marketed its whiskey as uniquely trustworthy. "When he was building his own brand, Tommy Dewar publicized the perilous alternative—the liquor of unknown provenance he once characterized as 'squirrel whiskey,' so called because, he said, 'it will make men talk nutty and climb trees....' Naturally, there was an alternative: Drink Dewar's!"⁴² Dewar's has continued this theme of trustworthiness in its marketing, from the advertisements for its White Label brand that proclaim it the whiskey that "never varies" through its present "True Scotch" campaign.⁴³ While Canadian Club, the other counterfeit label the Op finds in a Personville warehouse,⁴⁴ is not as strident in its marketing claims of authenticity, actual bottles of the brand were widely available during Prohibition alongside their

⁴¹ Okrent, *Last Call*, 210-11.

⁴² Okrent, *Last Call*, 210.

⁴³ "Dewar's: True Scotch since 1846," John Dewar and Sons Company, accessed November 22, 2015, <http://livetrue.dewars.com/us/home/scotch>.

⁴⁴ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 210.

counterfeit counterparts, thanks to the ease of smuggling Canadian alcohol through the French island of St. Pierre, all of fifteen miles off the Canadian coast.⁴⁵

By themselves, these bottles that lie about their contents provide another, perhaps minor, example of the depth of the deceit that floods Poisonville. But the context of Prohibition in which Hammett wrote *Red Harvest* suggests that alcoholic imagery deserves particular scrutiny, particularly in this novel that so thoroughly mirrors American corruption fueled by Prohibition. The importance of the imagery of bootleg alcohol becomes especially apparent when juxtaposed with the uncorrupted alcohol the Op brings with him from San Francisco.

Because of both the language Hammett uses when describing his own alcohol, as opposed to the alcohol he finds in Personville, and because of San Francisco's unique lack of Prohibition enforcement in the 1920s, it is clear that the Op's San Franciscan bottle of King George is a categorically different product than the bottles of "Dewar" and "Canadian Club" he takes for himself in the course of his Personville operation. Okrent identifies San Francisco, along with Baltimore, New Orleans, and Detroit, as one of four contenders for the "wettest city" under Prohibition.⁴⁶ In contrast to dry Los Angeles, "San Francisco had officially declared its distaste for Prohibition even before it had started. Back in 1919, the city's considerate board of supervisors, mindful of the hardship about to be visited upon its citizens, had unanimously repealed the city ordinance banning unlicensed saloons."⁴⁷ In addition to this local disregard for Prohibition enforcement, federal enforcement in the city was thoroughly corrupted, making it easy for alcohol to

⁴⁵ Okrent, *Last Call*, 168-69.

⁴⁶ Okrent, *Last Call*, 257.

⁴⁷ Okrent, *Last Call*, 126.

flow into the city from nearby vineyards and the city's working ports. Undoubtedly some of the alcohol in San Francisco bore counterfeit labels, but the city was nonetheless a place apart from the Prohibition norm, "the only place in America where the distribution of wine was practiced without guns." Or the place where Smedley Butler, on New Year's Eve 1926, witnessed "an orgy" as he had "never before witnessed."⁴⁸ Liquor flowed with considerable freedom in Prohibition San Francisco, which is why the Op's explanation, "Brought it from San Francisco with me," is sufficient when Dinah Brand marvels that King George "isn't bad Scotch."⁴⁹

Even when he does not name its city of origin, the language with which the Op describes his bottle of King George emphasizes the importance of its San Franciscan provenance. When referring to the alcohol he finds in bootleggers' Personville warehouses, the Op consistently stresses the deceit of its packaging. He pockets a "bottle labeled *Dewar*," rather than a bottle *of Dewar's*, and later refers to that bottle's contents as "so-called Dewar."⁵⁰ While investigating another warehouse toward the end of the novel, the Op finds "Canadian Club" whiskey in a stack of "wooden cases piled six high, branded *Perfection Maple Syrup*.... The bottles inside had Canadian Club labels that looked as if they had been printed with a rubber stamp." When he returns to fellow operative Mickey Linehan, waiting for him in the car outside the warehouse, the Op brings out his bottle of "anything but Canadian Club" to share a drink.⁵¹ By contrast, the Scotch the Op has brought with him from San Francisco is always just "King George"

⁴⁸ Okrent, *Last Call*, 258.

⁴⁹ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 129.

⁵⁰ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 128.

⁵¹ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 210-11.

without qualification, as when he first names the whiskey after taking a drink of it in his hotel room: “The snifter revived me a lot. I poured more of the King George into a flask, pocketed it, and went down to the taxi.”⁵²

The contrast is especially stark when the Op offers Dinah Brand her choice between a Personville “brand” of “whiskey” and King George. Upon the Op’s return to his hotel room after the failed raid on the Cedar Hill Inn, his feet soaked with alcohol, Dinah asks him, “Do you only perfume yourself with booze, or is there any for drinking purposes?” The Op responds, “Here’s a bottle of so-called Dewar that I picked up at Cedar Hill this afternoon. There’s a bottle of King George in my bag. What’s your choice?” The Op’s narration of her choice is poetically ironic: “She voted for King George.”⁵³

The humor of Brand’s “voting” for a brand of whiskey named after a monarch drives home the falsity of the “choice” the Op offers. The irony here is too rich, however, only to apply to this one small choice between intoxicants. In addition to the Op’s Scotch, there are two other “Kings” in Personville. Brand tells the Op about “King, our sheriff, eight thousand dollars in debt four years ago, now the owner of as nice a collection of downtown business blocks as you’d want to see.”⁵⁴ Personville’s corrupt marriage of capitalism and government has made it possible for one man to be Sheriff King (or

⁵² Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 41.

⁵³ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 128.

⁵⁴ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 129.

Sheriff/King). It is especially telling that, in the course of the Op's interactions with police throughout the novel, he never once meets Sheriff King.⁵⁵

The Op does frequently find himself on King Street, which, like most streets in Personville, has a name bearing meaning for the people who occupy it and the events that occur upon it. For example, Dinah Brand lives on Hurricane Street, where she helps the Op in "stirring things up" into a hurricane of violence.⁵⁶ Likewise, the office of Charles Proctor Dawn, the corrupt lawyer who tries to get money from the Op through blackmail, is located on Green Street.⁵⁷ The Op names King Street many times, usually in relation to major businesses and government buildings, references suggesting that it is one of the small city's major thoroughfares. It is also the street that seems to point the way to Personville's seat of power, only to reveal that no one *person* holds the throne. City Hall is on King Street,⁵⁸ "Whisper's got a joint over on King Street,"⁵⁹ and the men who rob Willsson's First National Bank were "last seen...when they made the turn into King Street."⁶⁰ While men of power do their (primarily criminal) business on King Street, Hammett muddles any clear association between the street and a ruling power in the city by referring to Elihu Willsson (the address of whose house is never stated) as "The czar

⁵⁵ It is worth noting as well that on the novel's final page the Op declares his intention to hide out at a hotel in Ogden, registered under the name "P. F. King." One can speculate ad nauseam as to the intended referents of the initials "P. F." Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 215.

⁵⁶ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 85. Hurricane Street is also, as McCann notes, "the site of the murder that begins the novel's wave of destruction.... That name seems at first inappropriate to a Western mining city, but it turns out to foreshadow the manner in which violence in such a world increases in fury, 'boil[ing] out under the lid' until it assumes the force of a natural disaster." McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 82.

⁵⁷ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 173.

⁵⁸ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 120.

⁵⁹ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 49.

⁶⁰ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 125.

of Poisonville.”⁶¹ To drive home the point that pervasive, corrupting deceit, rather than any one human “King,” is the ruling force in Personville, Hammett has the Op point out the empty throne while walking with Robert Albury through the First National Bank: “We followed [the cashier] down the length of the lobby, through a gate, and into an office whose door was labeled *President*—old Elihu’s office. Nobody was in it.”⁶²

The Op’s bottle of King George, in the five words, “She voted for King George,” becomes a totem for the pervasive corruption of all aspects of Personville and therefore of Prohibition-era American society. These include alcohol, of course, but also democracy, law, and the masculine public sphere. Jack London’s belief in reform through the passage of prohibition laws reflected his Progressive politics. In California as elsewhere, as Marling notes, “The Progressives had found their *bête noire* in liquor,”⁶³ and the passage of a Constitutional Amendment banning its manufacture, sale, and transportation seemed a clear victory. According to McCann, *Red Harvest* dramatizes the unanticipated blowback: “If Progressive reformers once hoped they could ‘clear the burg of vice and corruption,’ Hammett suggested... that they had turned out to be sadly mistaken. Indeed, *Red Harvest* is emphatically a post-Progressive novel.... Poisonville is the place where Progressive, along with Klannish, fancies come to die.”⁶⁴

As I have argued in this chapter, however, *Red Harvest* is not just a “post-Progressive novel.” It is a novel specifically about Prohibition, and only through close examination of its language, story, and characters in that particular historical context does

⁶¹ Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 13.

⁶² Hammett, *Red Harvest*, 59.

⁶³ Marling, *American Roman Noir*, 113.

⁶⁴ McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 110-11.

its despairing modernist critique of corruption and the futility of reform come into clear view. Crucially, a focus on the novel in the context of Prohibition makes it possible to begin carefully unpacking the oft-noted but rarely examined role of heavy drinking in the hard-boiled detective genre. In the passage from the career of Dashiell Hammett, the genre's first canonical author, to its next, Raymond Chandler, the gendered nature of heavy drinking becomes especially significant.

In the particular ease with which she interacts with the Op and the gangsters that populate *Red Harvest*, heavy-drinking Dinah Brand embodies the gendered threat of corruption posed by Prohibition. As the public figure of Pauline Sabin suggests, the gender of this imagined threat to public morality was both literal and metaphorical. In fact, even Sabin was scandalized by the manner in which Prohibition had brought women into public view. "Girls of a generation ago would not have ventured into a saloon," she once argued. "Girls did not drink; it was not considered 'nice.' But today girls and boys drink, at parties and everywhere, then stop casually at a speakeasy on the way home."⁶⁵ Jack London seemed to think enfranchising women would lead only to closed saloons. Pauline Sabin witnessed the opposite effect and did not like the apparent moral changes it implied. Ironically, she therefore worked to further increase women's presence in public: "Women had won the vote in 1919, but by opposing the dominant position of the WCTU [Women's Christian Temperance Union] and its allies, Sabin and the WONPR [Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform] proved that women were not a monolithic political bloc."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Okrent, *Last Call*, 224.

⁶⁶ Okrent, *Last Call*, 363-64.

Read backwards from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, Dinah Brand in many ways looks like a feminist figure: she is intelligent, largely self-sufficient, and very assertive of her desires. In the Prohibition context of *Red Harvest*'s creation, however, she seems to have been intended as a worrisome emblem of women's incursions into the masculine public sphere. As such, she is an important antecedent to Chandler's *femmes fatales*, portrayed by the author, as I argue in the next chapter, with little of Hammett's subtlety.

Chapter Three

“As Black as Carry Nation’s Bonnet”: Raymond Chandler and the Gendered Virtue of Heavy Drinking in *Farewell, My Lovely*

In 1958, Raymond Chandler set up an interview with the Prohibition-era gangster “Lucky” Luciano Luciana on commission from the London *Sunday Times*. The newspaper never published the resulting article, in part because Helga Greene, who counted among Chandler’s late-in-life “minder-companion-fans” and sat in on the interview, warned the *Times* that Chandler and Luciana were very drunk by the end of it.¹ The publisher may also have objected to the article’s contents, which defend Luciana’s character based on Chandler’s brief, drunken impression of him in juxtaposition to the corrupt American justice system that condemned him. Indeed, the article provides a link between the observations of unchecked greed made by Chandler’s fictional counterpart, private eye Philip Marlowe, and the Continental Op’s earlier confrontation with atmospheric corruption in Hammett’s *Red Harvest* through its descriptions of Prohibition’s fundamental legal and moral failures:

During the Prohibition era, [Luciana] became a bootlegger or proprietor of gambling houses. So, considering his handicaps, he must have been a very able man. Of course these were illegal activities under the law, but few Americans except bluenoses or fanatics ever believed in prohibition. Most of us went to speakeasies and bought bootleg liquor quite openly, the ‘most of us’ including

¹ *The Raymond Chandler Papers: Selected Letters and Nonfiction, 1909-1959*, ed. Tom Hiney and Frank MacShane (New York: Grove, 2000), 213-15, 250-51.

judges, police officers and government officials. I remember that in one night club in Culver City...two policemen were always on duty – not to keep you from getting liquor, but to keep you from bringing your own instead of buying it from the house.²

The entire Luciana affair, from the interview through the article and Greene's intervention in its publication, gives light to Chandler's fictional portrayals of male and female heavy drinking as a social act and a moral barometer. Although "Lucky" Luciano was a man of dubious moral integrity, his conviviality and warmth were sufficient for Chandler to argue, in an article intended for publication in a major English newspaper, that Luciana "was deliberately framed by an ambitious prosecutor." Chandler provides some evidence to support this theory, but it seems to originate primarily from Luciana's enjoyable company:

He seemed to me about as much like a tough mobster as I am like the late unlamented Mussolini. He has a soft voice, a patient sad face, and is extremely courteous in every way. This might all be a front, but I don't think I am that easily fooled. A man who has been involved in brutal crimes bears a mark. Luciano seemed to be a lonely man who had been endlessly tormented and yet bore little or no malice. I liked him and had no reason not to. He is probably not perfect, but neither am I.³

While Chandler felt a strong homosocial bond with Luciana, the female observer to their kinship prevented Chandler from sharing his affection with the "newspaper

² *Chandler Papers*, 252.

³ *Chandler Papers*, 252-53.

public” that only knew Luciana as “a very evil man,” if they knew of him at all.⁴

Drinking scenes in Chandler’s fiction replicate the dynamics of Chandler’s real-world experience with “Lucky” Luciano and Helga Greene: Philip Marlowe regularly attempts to reestablish an ideal of working-class male homosocial conviviality and regularly finds that female intrusion, represented by Chandler as a form of greed, makes such social bonds impossible. Whereas the use of counterfeit Prohibition alcohol in *Red Harvest* indicates Hammett’s general sense of a lost political and social ideal, Chandler’s Philip Marlowe novels make the gender of that lost ideal explicit. According to the alcoholic semiotics of Chandler’s Philip Marlowe novels, in bringing about the end of the saloon, the temperance women who enacted Prohibition knotted honest masculine social bonds with female chicanery and transgressive greed. While Chandler’s early novels consistently portray female drinking as excessive and manipulative, *Farewell, My Lovely* portrays the full spectrum of Chandler’s drinking types, from the most convivial and vital warrior- or working-class male drinker to the most grotesquely excessive and self-interested female alcoholic. This boozy tableau connects women’s alcoholic thirsts with their socioeconomic ambitions to make the narrative argument that women should stay out of the public sphere or be punished, but as long as the public sphere has been corrupted by feminine greed, men have no choice but to engage in corruption and vice (particularly by drinking) or perish.

Class, Gender and Alcohol in *The Big Sleep*

⁴ *Chandler Papers*, 252.

As with *Red Harvest*, it is tempting to read Raymond Chandler's novels, especially *The Big Sleep* (1939) and *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), as Marxist texts, particularly given their publication during the Great Depression. To be sure, in many ways Chandler's novels foreground distrust between working class and wealthy Americans, during the Depression and beyond. However, in a 1945 letter to Dale Warren at Houghton Mifflin, Chandler downplays the Marxist possibilities of his fiction: "There was even a bird who informed me I could write a good proletarian novel; in my limited world there is no such animal, and if there were, I am the last mind in the world to like it, being by tradition and long study a complete snob. P. Marlowe and I do not despise the upper classes because they take baths and have money; we despise them because they are phony."⁵ The vagueness of this concept of upper-class behavior as "phony" allows Marlowe to find virtue in some wealthy people and vice in others. Consistently, the divide behind the two camps is cleanly delineated by gender and signified by Marlowe's observations and opinions of his wealthy companions' drinking behaviors.

Chandler begins defining the relative phoniness of wealthy men and women according to their alcoholic and sexual thirsts from the beginning of his first Marlowe novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939). Arriving at the palatial residence of a potential new client, Marlowe is "neat, clean, shaved and sober . . . I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be." Almost immediately and in quick succession, his sober innocence is challenged by each of three members of the Sternwood family. First Carmen Sternwood, the younger of General Sternwood's two daughters, unexpectedly comes out to meet Marlowe in the front hall, "walk[ing] as if she were floating." Before she begins

⁵ *Chandler Papers*, 51.

flirting with Marlowe rather aggressively, Marlowe notes several other strange aspects of Carmen's appearance and comportment. "She had little sharp predatory teeth, as white as fresh orange pith and as shiny as porcelain. They glistened between her thin too taut lips. Her face lacked color and didn't look too healthy."⁶ Marlowe soberly resists Carmen's sexual advances until the butler returns to take him to meet General Sternwood in his greenhouse. There, amid orchids that "smelled as overpowering as boiling alcohol under a blanket," he finds that the General is "an old and obviously dying man," whose "face was a leaden mask" with "bloodless lips." He further observes that the General has "thin clawlike hands" and "a few locks of dry white hair [clinging] to his scalp, like wild flowers fighting for life on a bare rock."⁷

Marlowe's initial observations of Carmen support Sean McCann's assertion that her character "is a classic and ludicrously exaggerated example of the female vampire." McCann further argues that "though more subtly, Chandler suggests similar qualities in her sister and her father" and that through this vampiric family of characters, "in a kind of pseudo-Marxism, Chandler paints capital as a vampiric force driven to steal the labor power of honest workingmen" like Marlowe. McCann draws compelling connections between General Sternwood's accumulation of wealth by draining oil from now-abandoned oil fields and his daughters' appetites for "male vitality" that leave so many men they encounter drained to death.⁸ However, McCann does not give attention to the closely related imagery of alcoholic thirst in his analysis of the Sternwoods' vampirism.

⁶ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 3, 5.

⁷ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 7-8.

⁸ Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 167-68.

In order to fully understand the vampirism of the Sternwood family in *The Big Sleep*, we must take Chandler at his word that he does not begrudge the wealthy their wealth and take heed of the place of privilege the author gives to alcoholic thirst in Marlowe's initial encounters with the Sternwoods.

After Marlowe thoroughly describes the General's all-but-lifeless physical state, "the old man dragged his voice up from the bottom of a well" to speak his first words of the novel: "Brandy, Norris. How do you like your brandy, sir?" Marlowe's response, "Any way at all," conveys to the General and to the reader the mutual understanding between these two men of widely divergent social class. The General both proclaims his elevated economic station and suggests its relative insignificance when he replies, "I used to like mine [brandy] with champagne. The champagne as cold as Valley Forge and about a third of a glass of brandy beneath it." While Marlowe makes clear that he does not need champagne to make his liquor palatable, the General's description of his favored mixed drink reveals that the expensive sparkling wine is just a vehicle for a substantial intake of brandy ("a third of a glass"). Likewise, the comparison of cold champagne and Valley Forge emphasizes the importance the General places on homosocial or fraternal bonds rather than on class associations. The comparison first of all suggests that, at the end of his life, the General's experiences as a warrior are dearer to him than his experiences as a businessman. Furthermore, the specific reference to Valley Forge aligns the General with George Washington, a symbol much less of capitalism than of patriotism. Particularly in the national memory of Valley Forge, Washington appears not as a figure of dominance but as a leader within a fraternity, advocating for his soldiers as he suffers privations along with them.

Indeed, in the comparison with Valley Forge, the General undercuts the class associations of champagne by emphasizing the function of alcohol that Marlowe most values but that so often eludes him: the forging of fraternal bonds through homosocial conviviality. Though McCann ultimately casts *The Big Sleep* as a critique of capitalism, he begins his argument from the premise that “Chandler returned time and again to a vision of male fellowship and showed the way it was undermined by the various evils of the modern world....each of the novels for which Chandler is best remembered—*The Big Sleep*, *Farewell, My Lovely*, *The Long Goodbye*—depicts the deep feeling between Philip Marlowe and some idealized brother figure; and each shows that brotherhood falling prey to corruption and exploitation.” McCann further argues, citing Chandler’s 1943 novel *The Lady in the Lake*, “that Chandler could imagine the fellowship of decent men forming only during wartime.”⁹ In *The Big Sleep*, General Sternwood seems to have made the same connection between war and male fellowship through the unifying metaphor of brandy served with champagne.

McCann claims that “there is a subtle antagonism running between the detective and his client [General Sternwood] all through the novel,” but this argument again ignores the central importance of alcoholic imagery and therefore also the elusive male camaraderie that McCann himself identifies as the “organizing principle” of Chandler’s fiction.¹⁰ While there are clear parallels between General Sternwood’s capitalistic vampirism and his daughters’ sexual vampirism, according to the alcoholic semiotics of *The Big Sleep* the ethics of the General’s business pursuits should be read as feminine

⁹ McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 140-41, 144.

¹⁰ McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 169, 140.

qualities imposed upon a masculine warrior who has been depleted by “a rather gaudy life” and two daughters who “go their separate and slightly divergent roads to perdition.”¹¹ Marlowe’s descriptions of the General do not evoke vampirism so much as victimhood, depletion, and death. The General may want Marlowe to find Rusty Regan, his daughter Vivian’s missing husband and his own beloved drinking companion, but his designs on Rusty are opposite those of his vampiric daughters. The contrasting uses of alcohol in the scenes of Marlowe’s respective introductions to the General and Vivian symbolically heighten the gendering of vampiric corruption and exploitation in *The Big Sleep*.

“A nice state of affairs when a man has to indulge his vices by proxy,” the General says to Marlowe as they await the butler’s return with brandy. “You are looking at a very dull survival of a rather gaudy life, a cripple paralyzed in both legs with only half of his lower belly. There’s very little that I can eat and my sleep is so close to waking that it is hardly worth the name. I seem to exist largely on heat.” While the General describes his own depletion, he revels in seeing Marlowe nourished, so to speak, by the vices he cannot indulge. After Norris arrives and prepares a brandy and soda for Marlowe, the detective “sipped the drink. The old man licked his lips watching me, over and over again, drawing one lip slowly across the other with a funeral absorption, like an undertaker dry-washing his hands.”¹² The General soon explains that Rusty Regan used to occupy the position Marlowe currently holds opposite himself in the balmy greenhouse. “He was the breath of life to me—while he lasted. He spent hours with me,

¹¹ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 9, 13.

¹² Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 9.

sweating like a pig, drinking brandy by the quart and telling me stories of the Irish revolution,” before disappearing without a word a month before the novel begins.¹³ The General’s “funeral absorption” in Marlowe’s enjoyment of his drink apparently derives, then, from the memory of his lost companion, “the breath of life” who disappeared without a word, the reader eventually learns, because Carmen Sternwood killed him and Vivian put his body in one of the General’s abandoned wells.

When unexpectedly called upon by Vivian Sternwood, Marlowe finds in her room a negative image of the General’s orchid-choked greenhouse. “This room was too big, the ceiling was too high, the doors were too tall, and the white carpet that went from wall to wall looked like a fresh fall of snow at Lake Arrowhead.... The ivory furniture had chromium on it, and the enormous ivory drapes lay tumbled on the white carpet a yard from the windows. The white made the ivory look dirty and the ivory made the white look bled out.” While the greenhouse is filled with heat, humidity and plant life to sustain the General’s own failing hold on life, his older daughter’s room is the embodiment of stark, lifeless superfluity. Likewise, while the General’s indulgence in alcohol is (if only by necessity) selfless, Vivian’s is entirely selfish. “She had a drink,” Marlowe notes after looking over her body. “She took a swallow from it and gave me a cool level stare over the rim of the glass.”¹⁴ Whereas the General looks longingly at Marlowe as Marlowe sips the brandy he cannot drink himself, Vivian swallows from her drink while staring at Marlowe confidently, challenging him. Even when Vivian gets a refill, which she does by wordlessly waving her empty glass at a maid, she offers nothing to the detective. By the

¹³ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 11.

¹⁴ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 17.

time Marlowe calls Vivian out for “drinking your lunch out of a Scotch bottle,” the reader may well have forgotten, amid the accumulating description of Vivian’s greedy thirst, that Marlowe has just had two brandy-and-sodas before noon himself. Vivian reaches the pinnacle of alcoholic-vampiric excess when she “slammed her glass down so hard that it slopped over on an ivory cushion,”¹⁵ staining that which had previously only appeared “dirty” in contrast to the “bled out” white of the carpet.

“I loathe masterful men,” Vivian complains, frustrated in her attempts to ply information about Marlowe’s meeting with her father from the detective.¹⁶ According to the alcoholic semiotics of the novel, mastery is a masculine quality, as evidenced by Marlowe’s ability to maintain his composure as Vivian “ritz[es]” him even while he is under the influence of the General’s brandy.¹⁷ Indeed, while Vivian both hungers for alcohol, swallowing what Marlowe only sips, and behaves extravagantly while drinking it, Marlowe rarely, if ever, betrays any negative or positive effect that the alcohol he frequently drinks has on his mood, behavior, or comportment. That Chandler both begins and ends the novel with examples of this contrast between masterful masculine heavy drinking and excessive feminine alcoholism speaks to the central importance of alcoholic imagery in *The Big Sleep*. When Marlowe finally extracts a confession from Vivian in the novel’s final pages, she includes an explanation for (at least some of) her excessive drinking behavior. “He’s in the sump.... A horrible decayed thing. I did it. I did just what

¹⁵ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 19.

¹⁶ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 20.

¹⁷ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 19.

you said. . . . There have been times when I hardly believed it all myself. And other times when I had to get drunk quickly—whatever time of day it was. Awfully damn quickly.”¹⁸

Vivian thus reveals her dependence on alcohol to quell intense feelings of guilt over her role in her husband’s murder. Upon leaving the Sternwood mansion for the final time, Marlowe narrates that he too is “a part of the nastiness now” and, in the novel’s final paragraph, tries himself to drink to forget the nastiness. “On the way downtown, I stopped at a bar and had a couple of double Scotches. They didn’t do me any good.”¹⁹ Marlowe’s moral character is such that, even when he consciously desires to get drunk enough to forget the nastiness he has worked to eliminate, alcohol does not work on him. Marlowe never has the opposite problem with alcohol—he never experiences greater-than-intended effects. By contrast, one of the novel’s major plot points involves Carmen being drugged into a nearly unconscious stupor by a blackmailer with a mixed drink of ether and laudanum.

In short, *The Big Sleep* establishes the feminine gendering of corruption, greed, and general “nastiness” in Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe novels largely through Marlowe’s observations of his own and others’ experiences of drinking alcohol. The mystery at the heart of the novel—what happened to Rusty Regan?—is really no more than an old soldier’s search for his lost drinking companion, who the reader finally learns was killed by the old man’s own insatiable daughters. Both Rusty and the General represent, for Marlowe and Chandler, the disappearing virtue of the masculine warrior ethic as it is being driven to extinction by the feminization of the public sphere. *The Big*

¹⁸ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 229.

¹⁹ Chandler, *Big Sleep*, 230, 31.

Sleep established the antagonism between drinking men and alcoholic women as a metonym for the conflict between the masculine warrior ethos and the greedy, corrupt, feminized modern public sphere. *Farewell, My Lovely*, Chandler's second Marlowe novel, elaborates on these alcoholic semiotics, providing a Rosetta stone of acceptable and unacceptable drinking types in American hard-boiled detective fiction that, in turn, defines Marlowe's and Chandler's limits for acceptable female socioeconomic ambition.

The Femme Fatale in *Farewell, My Lovely*

In Chandler's fiction generally, Philip Marlowe takes the reader on a serpentine tour of modern Los Angeles, identifying along the way the sites and sources of modern vice as well as the fading virtues of pre-modern masculinity he strives to protect. In *The Big Sleep*, as I have argued above, Marlowe identifies vice in the sexual and alcoholic excesses of the Sternwood daughters, from whom Marlowe feels he must protect the depleted General Sternwood, the human embodiment of masculine warrior virtue. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Chandler darkens this gendered divide between virtue and vice by sending Marlowe on something like a bar crawl across Depression-era Los Angeles, placing detective and bottle opposite men and women from across the spectra of both drinking behavior and socioeconomic class.

What emerges from this boozy urban safari is a stark rubric for women's ambition and thirst and a much more complicated but significantly more forgiving set of rules for men. Specifically, Marlowe observes that men *must* drink to survive in the corrupt modern world, just as most men must engage in corrupt business, political, or law enforcement practices. Men have no choice but to indulge vice or die, and Chandler's

ideal figures of masculine warrior virtue eventually do perish. In the modern, feminized, capitalist public sphere, ambition is indistinguishable from corruption. According to the proscriptions of Chandler's "virulent antifeminism,"²⁰ women can—and should—opt out of the public sphere. Indeed, Chandler's narratives of elusive masculine kinship effectively argue that, if all women would only remain in the private sphere, the public sphere would never have been corrupted to begin with. Therefore, the corruption that is inevitable for men is unforgivable for women.

For Chandler and Marlowe, all women are too ambitious, and their ambition manifests itself in their interference with men's drinking, whereby they either discourage drinking or attempt to participate in it. The best possible modern woman, embodied by Anne Riordan in *Farewell, My Lovely*, allows men to set limits on her ambition while doing little more than teasing to interfere with their drinking. The worst woman, Helen Grayle, drinks heavily not only to satisfy her own alcoholic thirst but also to manipulate masculine drinkers like Marlowe to her will and satisfy her sexual, socioeconomic, and primal, bloodthirsty desires. As a prominent signifier of her inappropriate desire or greed, her alcoholic excess parallels her socioeconomic ambition, whereby she rejects her former subservient identity as a working-class performing woman and for which, by the logic of Chandler's alcoholic semiotics, she must be punished.

"A guy can't stay honest if he wants to," a police sergeant named Galbraith, whom Marlowe refers to as Hemingway, complains. "That's what's the matter with this country. He gets chiseled out of his pants if he does. You gotta play the game dirty or you

²⁰ McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 164.

don't eat."²¹ As Chandler's representative of a totally average man, "just tough cop, neither bad nor good, neither crooked nor honest,"²² Hemingway is worth taking at his word regarding what men must do to survive in modern Los Angeles. Indeed, Marlowe is sometimes at pains to justify the behavior of male characters according to Hemingway's logic. After violently subduing the orderly tasked with keeping him docile in his room at Dr. Sonderborg's private care facility, Marlowe takes a moment to see the episode from his now-unconscious jailer's perspective. "I was sorry for him. A simple hardworking little guy trying to hold his job down and get his weekly pay check. Maybe with a wife and kids. Too bad. And all he had to help him was a sap. It didn't seem fair.... I patted his shoulder. I almost cried over him."²³ Marlowe feels similar sympathy for Hemingway, with whom he makes peace even though Hemingway and another Bay City detective left him to be held captive at Dr. Sonderborg's in the first place.

Most strikingly, among Marlowe's foremost concerns in *Farewell, My Lovely* is the desire to justify his sympathy and affection for Moose Malloy, an ex-convict who murders two people over the course of the novel. Like Rusty Regan in *The Big Sleep*, Moose Malloy is a representative of Marlowe's working-class masculine ideal. Like Rusty as well as General Sternwood, Moose is built to be a warrior in a place and time that, while violent, has no need for warriors. In fact, with Moose, Chandler cartoonishly heightens the contrast between this masculine ideal and his Depression-era urban setting in order to make the point. Marlowe first discovers Malloy outside a Black-owned "dine and dice emporium called Florian's.... He was a big man but not more than six feet five

²¹ Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 232.

²² Chandler, *Farewell*, 252.

²³ Chandler, *Farewell*, 173-74.

inches tall and not wider than a beer truck.” Moose’s first action upon entering the building is to throw a man from the stairway leading to Florian’s on the building’s upper floor clear across the sidewalk and into the gutter. Upon following Moose into the building, Marlowe finds that even he compares poorly with Malloy’s effortless brutality: “A hand I could have sat in came out of the dimness and took hold of my shoulder and squashed it to a pulp. Then the hand moved me through the doors and casually lifted me up a step.” While continuing “to chew my muscles up some more with his iron fingers,” Moose tells Marlowe to join him in a couple drinks at the bar. Although Marlowe explains that Florian’s is a “colored joint” where they will be unwelcome, Moose insists, repeating several times that a woman he knew named Velma used to work at Florian’s.²⁴

What follows is the novel’s first of many drinking scenes, the only such scene in which Marlowe has an ideal male companion even if nothing else is quite as Marlowe would like it to be. After dispatching the bouncer by tossing him across the room and into the wall, Moose leads Marlowe to the bar, where they order whiskey sours. As they share the first round, Marlowe sees that “The big man made a fist into which his whiskey sour glass melted almost out of sight.” The drink seems to have a proportional lack of effect on Moose, who quickly orders a second round. He drinks his second whiskey sour “at a gulp” before ordering a third for Marlowe and himself.²⁵

Marlowe’s tense conviviality with Moose is cut short when the latter’s attempt to learn Velma’s whereabouts from the bar manager ends with Moose killing the manager, apparently in self-defense, and Moose runs away. Even though their companionship was

²⁴ Chandler, *Farewell*, 3, 5, 6.

²⁵ Chandler, *Farewell*, 11, 12.

forced upon him, and even though Marlowe sets out to help the police find Malloy, Chandler's detective sympathizes with Moose and, as he accumulates less desirable drinking companions over the course of the novel, comes to idealize this working-class Golem as the embodiment of an imagined convivial masculine past that he is.

Though he never explicitly says so, Marlowe is in search of the ideal male drinking companion throughout *Farewell, My Lovely* but finds honest homosocial conviviality only in stolen moments. He begins his search for Moose (the massive embodiment of Marlowe's elusive ideal) back in the African-American neighborhood from which Moose fled after committing murder. Despite his excessive sense of racial difference, which I will explore more fully in chapter 4, Marlowe finds a momentarily agreeable drinking companion in a black desk clerk at the Hotel Sans Souci, near Florian's. However, with the brief exception of the nameless clerk's cooperation during Marlowe's questioning, the clerk embodies what Marlowe odiously refers to as "the dead alien silence of another race,"²⁶ awaking from a motionless nap just long enough to share the two drinks he allows himself "before sundown" and impatiently complete Marlowe's interview. In spite of the racial wall between them, Marlowe and the clerk almost achieve a comfortable conviviality before the clerk "corked the bottle firmly" in response to Marlowe's suggestion that he "pour another drink." Likewise, despite his own regularly heavy alcohol consumption, Marlowe seems to agree with the clerk's assessment when he shares the intelligence that the original owner of Florian's, Mike Florian, led "A wasted life" that ended with "a case of pickled kidneys."²⁷ Such an inability to handle the

²⁶ Chandler, *Farewell*, 7.

²⁷ Chandler, *Farewell*, 24.

effects of alcohol consumption is an unmistakably feminine trait in Chandler's fiction, a trait personified in *Farewell, My Lovely* by Florian's widow Jessie.

Though he only knows of her late husband's alcoholic dissolution from the clerk at the Hotel Sans Souci, Marlowe witnesses firsthand and in disgusted detail Jessie Florian's alcoholic thirst and greed. As the first instance of Marlowe's drinking with a woman and one of the longest and most detailed drinking scenes in a novel consisting largely of drinking scenes, Marlowe's visit to Jessie Florian's house in chapter 5 deserves particular scrutiny in a close reading of *Farewell, My Lovely*. While his brief drinking session with the "Negro hotel clerk" confirms the view of African Americans that Marlowe has already stated explicitly—the clerk belongs to "another race," and he and the clerk are mutually "alien"—Marlowe's visit with Jessie Florian establishes the qualities that make a woman, in Marlowe's worldview, bad, and thereby points up the fundamental difference between male and female drinking in hardboiled detective fiction. In chapter 5 of *Farewell, My Lovely*, Chandler depicts Jessie Florian as almost a Gothic monster, embodying the alcoholic greed and grotesquely masculine ambition at the heart of women's drinking in his hardboiled detective fictions.

Through his proxy Marlowe, Chandler begins describing Jessie's failures as a woman by detailing the dilapidated state of her home, the private sphere that, in Chandler's worldview, it is a woman's imperative to maintain. In the chapter's opening paragraph, Marlowe describes the house almost like a malignant tumor killing the lot on which it festers: "1644 West 54th Place was a dried-out brown house with a dried-out brown lawn in front of it. There was a large bare patch around a tough-looking palm tree. On the porch stood one lonely wooden rocker, and the afternoon breeze made the

unpruned shoots of last year's poinsettias tap-tap against the cracked stucco wall. A line of stiff yellowish half-washed clothes jittered on a rusty wire in the side yard." After knocking on "the wooden margin of the screen door" because "The bell didn't work," Marlowe discovers that Jessie's neglect of her feminine duties includes thorough failure to attend to her personal appearance:

Slow steps shuffled and the door opened and I was looking into dimness at a blowsy woman who was blowing her nose as she opened the door. Her face was gray and puffy. She had weedy hair of that vague color which is neither brown nor blond, that hasn't enough life in it to be ginger, and isn't clean enough to be gray. Her body was thick in a shapeless outing flannel bathrobe many moons past color and design. It was just something around her body. Her toes were large and obvious in a pair of man's slippers of scuffed brown leather.²⁸

Like the Continental Op's lengthy description of Dinah Brand's appearance upon their first meeting, Marlowe's attention to the details of Jessie Florian's appearance stresses her peculiarity and prepares the reader for a character that defies the mold of femininity. However, while the Op's description of Dinah emphasizes the peculiar and troubling combination of feminine and masculine qualities, Marlowe's description of Jessie gives little attention to masculine features (with the exception of her "large and obvious" toes), focusing instead on her lack of identifiably feminine qualities so that Jessie appears to the reader as grotesquely monstrous by virtue of her lack of clear gender (or, for that matter, living human) identity. To put it another way, whereas Chandler introduced the Sternwood sisters as vampires in *The Big Sleep*, here he presents the first woman in

²⁸ Chandler, *Farewell*, 25-26.

Farewell, My Lovely as if she is a zombie, a walking corpse “many moons past” womanliness.

As Marlowe enters Jessie’s house, two items stand out in his observations of her filthy surroundings that point to the root causes of the widow’s dissolute state. The first is her radio: “I stepped through the door and hooked the screen again. A large handsome cabinet radio droned to the left of the door in the corner of the room. It was the only decent piece of furniture the place had. It looked brand new. Everything else was junk.” Uncomfortable in the unclean house, Marlowe cautiously sits down “on the end of a davenport” without leaning back, noting “a loose alcoholic overtone” in Jessie’s laugh when she claims that the radio is “All the comp’ny I got.” Marlowe soon confirms the suspected source of the “loose” quality of Jessie’s “titter”: “I leaned back against something hard, felt for it and brought up an empty quart gin bottle. The woman tittered again.”²⁹ Though Marlowe noticed the radio before anything else in the house, it is quickly subordinated to alcohol, becoming, in its symbolism of the exclusive importance Jessie places on keeping herself amused, primarily a metaphor for Jessie’s unquenchable thirst. The radio has literal significance in this regard, as well: as Detective-Lieutenant Randall notes later in the novel, “Drunks like loud radios.”³⁰

As Marlowe begins to question Jessie regarding the whereabouts of Velma, Moose Malloy’s former lover whom he might still be pursuing, Jessie underlines the importance she places on alcohol. Marlowe lies and tells Jessie that he is helping Velma’s parents find their daughter. “There’s a little money involved,” he claims, hinting that he

²⁹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 27.

³⁰ Chandler, *Farewell*, 213.

is willing to pay Jessie for useful information. “Not much. I guess they have to get her in order to touch it. Money sharpens the memory.” Jessie gets the hint, but poses a counter-offer: “So does liquor.”³¹ Jessie would prefer alcohol to money, since for her the former is really just a means to the latter end.

“I held up the dead soldier and shook it,” Marlowe narrates, the “dead soldier” being the empty quart bottle of gin he found in the couch cushions.³² Chandler’s contemporary readers would likely be familiar with the idiom he uses for an empty bottle that once held an alcoholic beverage: “dead soldier” has been in the American vernacular since the late nineteenth century, supplanting the less specific “dead man” which had prevailed for the previous two centuries.³³ The context in which Marlowe uses the image here, however, at the confluence of Marlowe’s masculine warrior and drinker ideals, gives the simple but rich metaphor additional resonance. Like the vampiric Sternwood sisters before her, Jessie Florian drains the spirits from “soldiers,” or more generally “men,” leaving them “dead” once she’s finished with them.

Tossing aside Jessie’s quart-sized dead soldier, Marlowe pulls out “the pint of bond bourbon the Negro hotel clerk and I had barely tapped,” juxtaposing his and the clerk’s self-control with Jessie’s alcoholic abandon. Jessie’s “eyes became fixed in an incredulous stare” upon Marlowe’s bottle of high-quality bourbon. The apparent cost of the liquor makes Jessie suspicious of Marlowe, whom she has thus far assumed is a policeman. Even as she questions Marlowe’s true identity, Jessie’s “eyes stayed on the

³¹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 28.

³² Chandler, *Farewell*, 28.

³³ *American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*, s.v. "Dead Soldier," accessed June 21, 2016, http://proxy.wm.edu/login?url=http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/hmidiom/dead_soldier/0.

bottle. Suspicion fought with thirst, and thirst was winning. It always does.... Seaweed colored eyes stayed on the bottle. A coated tongue coiled on her lips.”³⁴

Jessie finally retrieves “two thick smeared glasses” for the bourbon and tells Marlowe she either has available or wants “No fixin’s. Just what you brought is all.” Marlowe “poured her a slug that would have made me float over a wall. She reached for it hungrily and put it down her throat like an aspirin tablet.... I poured her another and a smaller one for me. She took it over to her rocker. Her eyes had turned two shades browner already.” Echoing the imagery of dead soldiers from Marlowe’s narration, Jessie effuses, “Man, this stuff dies painless with me.... It never knows what hit it.” A moment later, “she used her second drink. I went over and stood the bottle on an end beside her. She reached for it.”³⁵ In language that recalls the vampiric descriptions of the Sternwood sisters and their drinking in *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe observes Jessie “using” her drinks, not merely enjoying them. The return of color to her eyes after Jessie takes her first large drink as if it is medicine in particular suggests that, like an alcoholic vampire, Jessie must drink, killing “soldiers” in order to keep herself alive.

Unlike the Sternwood sisters, however, Jessie Florian is not just morally repugnant but truly grotesque to Marlowe. Setting Jessie apart from the vampirism of the Sternwoods is her complete lack of feminine physical attraction, so that her fleeting flirtations with Marlowe only make her more repugnant to the detective rather than dangerously alluring.³⁶ Her failure as a sexual vampire further emphasizes the grotesquery of her alcoholic thirst: her dissolution is so thorough that she prefers, and is

³⁴ Chandler, *Farewell*, 28.

³⁵ Chandler, *Farewell*, 29.

³⁶ Chandler, *Farewell*, 30.

only capable of attaining, the masturbatory pleasures provided by alcoholic “soldiers” to sexual release with flesh-and-blood men. Even with the high degree of alcoholic tolerance her “use” of Marlowe’s bourbon implies, her thirst proves greater than her capacity, and in little time Jessie begins to lose control of her body and mind under the influence. As she fumbles and crashes through the back of the house, looking for pictures of the women who used to work at Florian’s to share with Marlowe, the detective secretly observes her and notes significantly that “She was drunker than she thought.” And she only wants to get drunker: after retrieving a package of photographs for Marlowe, “She waddled back to the rocker and sat down and reached for the whiskey.”³⁷

Meanwhile, Marlowe has been avoiding drinking almost completely. During his visit, he has only one short drink to satisfy Jessie after she snaps, “You ain’t drinkin’.” Even then, he “swallowed what was in it slowly enough to make it seem more than it was.”³⁸ When he later tells her to “Pour me a drink before you kill the bottle,” it is again only in response to her suspicion, which she articulates by telling Marlowe, “I ain’t beginnin’ to like you again.” Though he certainly has a taste for alcohol, Marlowe has no interest in drinking with a woman like Jessie Florian, and asks her to pour him a drink only to distract her while he sweeps back through the house to search for a hidden photograph in her bedroom. Once Marlowe returns and explains the truth behind his interest in Velma, “A white look smeared the woman’s face. She pushed the bottle against her lips and gurgled at it. Some of the whiskey ran down her chin.”³⁹ Marlowe’s meeting with Jessie Florian roughly parallels, chronologically, his initial visit with Vivian

³⁷ Chandler, *Farewell*, 31.

³⁸ Chandler, *Farewell*, 30.

³⁹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 33, 34.

Sternwood in *The Big Sleep*. Though Jessie drinks much more, and more desperately, by herself than Vivian, the difference is of degree, not kind, and Marlowe's observations of the two women bear significant parallels as well. Jessie also drinks to quell negative emotions, like the fear that smears her face white. Her gurgling of alcohol also is not far removed from Vivian's swallowing, nor does her dribbling whiskey down her chin betray much greater excess than Vivian's slopping Scotch onto an ivory cushion.

In other words, Jessie is only unique among Chandler's alcoholic women by the degree of her alcoholic dissipation, by which she has passed beyond any semblance of feminine sexual attraction to being a grotesque display of nothing more than masturbatory alcoholic desire. Marlowe is therefore both disgusted by Jessie and, to a degree, by himself for feeding her thirst to his own ends. "A lovely old woman," he sneers in the narration. "I liked being with her. I liked getting her drunk for my own sordid purposes. I was a swell guy. I enjoyed being me. You find almost anything under your hand in my business, but I was beginning to be a little sick at my stomach." After Jessie spills most of what remains in the whiskey bottle on the carpet, "rattle[s]" it "against her teeth as she drain[s] it," then throws the bottle at Marlowe and misses, he finally decides, "I had enough of the scene, too much of it, far too much of it."⁴⁰

More repulsive to Marlowe than fearsome, Jessie Florian is Chandler's personification of the alcoholic id of female ambition. To conclude Marlowe's encounter with Jessie, Chandler briefly introduces us to her neighbor, who comes to embody something like Chandler's idea of woman's superego: "In the next house a window curtain was drawn aside and a narrow intent face was close to the glass, peering, an old

⁴⁰ Chandler, *Farewell*, 34, 35, 36.

woman's face with white hair and a sharp nose. Old Nosey checking up on the neighbors. There's always at least one like her to the block. I waved a hand at her. The curtain fell."⁴¹ When Marlowe later gets a call from Nulty, the detective-lieutenant in charge of the Malloy case, informing him that "some old window-peeker" reported his visit to the police, Marlowe correctly predicts, based only on the old woman's window-peeking habit, that she loathes and distrusts drinkers.⁴² Indeed, when Marlowe eventually visits "Old Nosey" and identifies himself as a detective, he immediately learns that, just as Jessie Florian's sole purpose in life seems to be to provide herself with pleasure (almost entirely by drinking), Old Nosey's purpose is to monitor (and, when necessary, report) the behavior of her neighbors. As Old Nosey (or Mrs. Morrison) puts it herself, "What else have I got to do but look out of the windows?"⁴³

As with Jessie Florian, Marlowe's brief initial observation of Mrs. Morrison's home furnishings provides a synecdoche of her character. "The hall smelled of furniture oil," Marlowe notes. "It had a lot of dark furniture that had once been in good style. Stuff with inlaid panels and scollops at the corners. We went into a front room that had cotton lace antimacassars pinned on everything you could stick a pin into." Like her "clean red and white apron,"⁴⁴ Mrs. Morrison's carefully maintained but out-of-style wooden furniture provides an image of a woman who, in stark contrast with Jessie, values the appearance of her domestic domain. At the same time, the fact that her apron is "clean"

⁴¹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 36.

⁴² Chandler, *Farewell*, 43.

⁴³ Chandler, *Farewell*, 110.

⁴⁴ Chandler, *Farewell*, 109.

suggests that she is really interested only in the surface appearance of feminine domestic virtue, not the actual work involved in maintaining a home.

While Jessie is obsessed with feeding her internal bodily desires, Mrs. Morrison delights in her external appearance and even more in her observations of others' superficial shortcomings. Though she is at first effusive upon learning that Marlowe is a detective and therefore a masculine kindred spirit of observation, she becomes aloof upon observing the smell of his breath. "Her eyes receded and her chin followed them. She sniffed hard. 'You been drinkin' liquor,' she said coldly." Marlowe tries to maintain her confidence by claiming, "I just had a tooth out. The dentist gave it to me. . . . It's bad stuff, except for medicine." Unfortunately, Mrs. Morrison takes a hard line on alcohol, explaining to Marlowe, "I don't hold with it for medicine neither."⁴⁵ Like the overbearing wife in a W. C. Fields comedy film, such as *The Bank Dick* (released in 1940, the same year *Farewell* was published), Mrs. Morrison is comically indignant at what she perceives as Marlowe's moral failings, identifiable by the smell of whiskey on his breath. Mrs. Morrison never quite trusts Marlowe after noticing the smell and threatens to call the police when he returns to interview her again (even though a police officer is with him already on this second visit).⁴⁶

Like the henpecking wives of Fields's films, the character of Mrs. Morrison parodies a specific group of Victorian women with whom a man of Chandler's and Fields's generation would be very familiar. Though Wayne Wheeler's Anti-Saloon League, male politicians, and, prior to the nineteenth amendment, an all-male electorate

⁴⁵ Chandler, *Farewell*, 110-11.

⁴⁶ Chandler, *Farewell*, 206.

ultimately ushered in national prohibition, women largely drove the long temperance movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that culminated in Prohibition. Like W. C. Fields and other producers of popular culture before, during, and after Prohibition, Chandler seems to have harbored ongoing resentment toward the women who, as Catherine Gilbert Murdock puts it, enacted “Reform through the aegis of enraged maternalism.”⁴⁷

Indeed, Mrs. Morrison, who moved from small, midwestern Mason City to Los Angeles twenty-two years before meeting Marlowe, has much in common with the woman who campaigned at the founding convention of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) for the elimination of alcohol even for medicinal uses. Murdock quotes that temperance woman’s preference to “gladly follow [her son] to the grave rather than see him come to the condition of one of these [drunkards].”⁴⁸ While wishing death before dissipation upon one’s own son is about as radical a temperance stance as possible, the face and namesake of prohibitionist extremism belong to Carry Nation, the saloon hatcheteer who has maintained a presence in American popular culture since she began smashing saloon interiors in 1901.⁴⁹ Of course, most cultural references to Nation can be found in the context of public drinking places, from early motion picture comedies like *Kansas Saloon Smashers* (1901) to twenty-first century drinking places bearing her name, such as Boston’s Carrie Nation Cocktail Club. It is all the more striking, then, that in *Farewell, My Lovely* Chandler refers to Nation entirely outside this

⁴⁷ Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 18.

⁴⁸ Murdock, *Domesticating Drink*, 25.

⁴⁹ Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 24.

context. When Marlowe accuses the “quack” psychic Jules Amthor of being “in a racket” while questioning Amthor about Lindsay Marriott, the lights suddenly go out just before Marlowe is attacked. Marlowe declares, “The room was as black as Carry Nation’s bonnet.”⁵⁰ Even when there is no drinking—or woman—involved (as neither are in this scene), danger, darkness, and “rackets” in Chandler’s hard-boiled fiction always revolve around images of feminine interference in homosocial masculine realms.

Both Jessie Florian, the woman ruined by her excessive mimicry of masculine behavior, and Mrs. Morrison, the busybody Victorian relic intent on policing the morality of her neighbors, are seemingly familiar character types from the broader American popular culture during Chandler’s lifetime. However, what differentiates them from, for instance, the caricatures of masculinized women or shrill feminists in political cartoons and early comedy motion pictures is that both characters ultimately represent an excess of *femininity* that only a *masculine* ego—Private Eye Philip Marlowe—can keep in check. While a reading of Jessie Florian’s character alone might suggest otherwise, women in Chandler’s fiction are not in danger of being corrupted by masculinity. Rather, the masculine public sphere has already been corrupted by femininity, and it is up to Marlowe to preserve what he can of the masculine warrior virtue that remains in modern Los Angeles. Feminine threats, which often prove fatal, come both from women intent on engaging, excessively, in masculine drinking behaviors and from women intent on interfering in men’s drinking. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Jessie Florian and Mrs. Morrison respectively represent these two varieties of transgressive feminine greed, while the two remaining major female characters, both more fully rounded and more directly involved

⁵⁰ Chandler, *Farewell*, 154.

in the novel's unfolding action, bear aspects of both. By submitting to the male ego embodied by Marlowe, Anne Riordan embodies Chandler's ideal of feminine morality. Helen Grayle's ultimate unwillingness to have her thirsts controlled, on the other hand, makes her the novel's lone deadly force.

The gendered logic of *Farewell, My Lovely* is such that, even though she commits two of the novel's four murders, Helen Grayle is ultimately portrayed as responsible for all four of them. Indeed, Marlowe argues that she is culpable even before he knows who Helen Grayle is. The novel begins with Moose Malloy killing a man while in pursuit of his lost love, working-class Velma Valento, and ends with Velma, who has transformed herself into wealthy Helen Grayle, killing Moose. At the outset, Marlowe poses the novel's argument for Velma/Helen's culpability, and against Moose's, when he tells Lieutenant Nulty to begin his investigation of the murder Moose committed by "looking for the girl.... Velma. Malloy will be looking for her. That's what started it all. Try Velma."⁵¹ Nearing the novel's climax, Marlowe restates the thesis by telling Moose, regarding his murder of Jessie Florian, "I'm not afraid of you. You're no killer. You didn't mean to kill her.... It's about time you learned your own strength.... You are strong enough to kill people without meaning to."⁵² Putting a period on the sentence, Velma/Helen shoots Moose "five times in the stomach" when he finally emerges to greet her for the first time in eight years—the first time, Moose finally realizes, since Velma turned him in to the police for committing a bank robbery.⁵³

⁵¹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 19.

⁵² Chandler, *Farewell*, 274-75.

⁵³ Chandler, *Farewell*, 282.

By the gendered logic of Chandler's fiction, because Moose kills two people while searching for the woman who rejected him, that woman is responsible for two deaths. That she kills Lindsay Marriott to protect her secrets and then finally, fatally rejects Moose only underlines her murderous feminine greed. Again, Marlowe makes clear the difference between Velma/Helen's moral culpability and Moose's when he tells Anne Riordan, "I think she meant to kill anybody she had to kill,"⁵⁴ an assumption exactly opposite the assumption he makes about Moose's intentions when he tells Moose, "You're no killer. You didn't mean to kill [Jessie Florian]." In one sense, Velma's rejection of Moose clearly represents her betrayal of the working class for her own gain. But Marlowe has equally deep sympathy for Moose Malloy and Velma/Helen's wealthy husband, Lewin Lockridge Grayle, clarifying again that, whatever Chandler's vague preference for working-class authenticity over upper-class phoniness, his greatest sympathy lies with those masculine men who are wearied by feminine, capitalist, modern urban life (much less so with those men who take on feminine qualities to make themselves more comfortable amid modernity, like Lindsay Marriott). Because femininity is akin to corruption, the only acceptable, possibly even likeable woman is one willing to subordinate her femininity to the prerogatives of Marlowe's warrior masculinity. The difference between a fatally insubordinate woman and an acceptably submissive woman is, as with all things gendered in *Farewell, My Lovely*, made evident through Marlowe's observations of women's drinking behaviors. When Marlowe first meets Helen Grayle, well before he knows she is really Velma Valento, Chandler

⁵⁴ Chandler, *Farewell*, 286.

juxtaposes her drinking behavior with Anne Riordan's to illustrate the range of feminine morality the two women, in tandem, represent.

Like chapter 5, in which he visits Jessie Florian for the first time, chapter 18 of *Farewell*, in which Marlowe first meets with Helen Grayle at her mansion, is one of the novel's longest, most sodden, and most revealing in terms of character—specifically in terms of the role gender plays in Marlowe's assessments of moral character. The opulent setting of this chapter, in juxtaposition with Jessie Florian and Mrs. Morrison's modest, decaying neighborhood, largely emphasizes the lack of importance Marlowe places on socioeconomic difference in terms of moral character. When Marlowe identifies the Grayle residence as one of the "great silent estates" on "the canyon side" of Aster Drive, he notes the man guarding the estate before describing the mansion itself. While this man's dress is appropriate for the gate guard or chauffeur of a wealthy family, Marlowe notes one disruptive detail: "He had a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and he held his head tilted a little, as if he liked to keep the smoke out of his nose."⁵⁵

Even though Helen Grayle has asked to see Marlowe at her home, the man guards the gate aggressively, even gesturing to imply that he is prepared to use a gun if necessary. After calling inside to confirm Marlowe's appointment and looking at Marlowe's driver's license, he is still not convinced that Marlowe belongs on the canyon side of Aster Drive. In a significant juxtaposition with the earlier introduction to Old Nosey, Marlowe and the gate guard finally establish a mutual feeling of trust when the detective steps out of his car and smells the man's breath:

He had nice breath. Haig and Haig at least.

⁵⁵ Chandler, *Farewell*, 119-20.

“You’ve been at the sideboy again,” I said.

He smiled....

“I just work here,” he said softly. “If I didn’t—” he let the rest hang in the air, and kept on smiling.

“You’re a nice lad,” I said and patted his shoulder. “Dartmouth or Dannemora?” “Christ,” he said. “Why didn’t you say were a cop?” We both grinned. He waved his hand and I went in through the half-open gate.⁵⁶

To those without knowledge of liquor and men’s prisons, terms like “Haig and Haig,” “sideboy,” and “Dannemora,” and thus the entire masculine exchange that finally earns Marlowe entry, are arcane. Ironically, Marlowe gains entry to the palatial estate at 862 Aster Drive by proving to the gate guard, in one of the novel’s fleeting moments of ideal masculine homosocial conviviality, that he knows neither of them really belongs there.

When he finally enters the living room to meet Mr. and Mrs. Grayle, Marlowe seems unsurprised to find Anne Riordan among the assembled company, “looking just as I had seen her last, except that she was holding a glass of amber fluid in her hand.”⁵⁷ Up to this point in the novel, Anne Riordan has not had anything to drink. In her previous interactions with Marlowe, she has instead only observed and commented on his drinking, illustrating her unique, mutually reinforcing roles as both Marlowe’s ideal woman (in Chandler’s words “the kind of girl Marlowe would have married if he had been the marrying kind”),⁵⁸ and as meta-commentator on the conventional characteristics

⁵⁶ Chandler, *Farewell*, 121.

⁵⁷ Chandler, *Farewell*, 123.

⁵⁸ Philip Durham, *Down These Mean Streets a Man Must Go: Raymond Chandler’s Knight* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 39.

of the heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective. “Oh—a hard-boiled gentleman,” she says upon meeting Marlowe at the scene of Lindsay Marriott’s murder. “I get it. You ask the answers. He-man stuff.”⁵⁹ Because she understands the “hard-boiled gentleman” personality, Anne campaigns to join Marlowe on his investigation by telling him, “You need a drink. Why not go back to my house and have one? You can phone the law from there.”⁶⁰ Anne understands that, although he has just been sapped, Marlowe is likely to want to drink on top of his head injury.

Though she encourages the hard-boiled drinking behavior she expects from Marlowe as they leave the scene of Marriott’s murder, Anne Riordan does criticize his heavy drinking as their relationship develops. Even so, however, she never does more than question and tease him about his habits. Anne visits Marlowe at his office the morning after finding him at the scene of Lindsay Marriott’s murder. Tellingly, Marlowe notes that she is wearing “a hat with a crown the size of a whiskey glass and a brim you could have wrapped the week’s laundry in.... She had a nice smile. She looked as if she had slept well. It was a nice face, a face you get to like. Pretty, but not so pretty that you would have to wear brass knuckles every time you took it out.”⁶¹ In addition to being attractive only to a practical degree, Anne Riordan is intelligent without being too ambitious about applying her intelligence to masculine pursuits. “Oh I know I’m just a damned inquisitive wench,” she says when Marlowe’s curt responses to the information she provides about Marriott’s murder make her fear she has overstepped her bounds. “But

⁵⁹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 68, 69.

⁶⁰ Chandler, *Farewell*, 76.

⁶¹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 87.

there's a strain of bloodhound in me. My father was a cop."⁶² Anne's humility and eagerness to legitimate her curiosity by explaining her father's masculine influence further limit the feminine greed of her already modest ambition to assist Marlowe with his investigation.

Marlowe emphasizes the separate sphere in which he expects Anne to remain when he reaches for the office bottle of whiskey:

I opened the deep drawer of the desk and got the office bottle out and poured myself a drink.

Miss Riordan watched me with disapproval. I was no longer a solid man. She didn't say anything. I drank the drink and put the bottle away again and sat down.

"You didn't offer me one," she said coolly.

"Sorry. It's only eleven o'clock or less. I didn't think you looked the type."

"Her eyes crinkled at the corners. "Is that a compliment?"

"In my circle, yes."

She thought that over. It didn't mean anything to her. It didn't mean anything to me either when I thought it over. But the drink made me feel a lot better.⁶³

Though Marlowe is unable to articulate why his failure to offer Anne a drink reflects his esteem for her, the fact that his solo drink makes Marlowe "feel a lot better" speaks to

⁶² Chandler, *Farewell*, 90.

⁶³ Chandler, *Farewell*, 91.

more than its effect on his hangover symptoms. In *The Big Sleep*, Vivian Sternwood challenges Marlowe by drinking alone in his presence before noon. Here, in his own office, Marlowe reestablishes Chandler's natural gendered order by drinking whiskey in the presence of a woman who is too deferential to do more than suggest he might have offered her a drink as well. Also like Vivian Sternwood, Marlowe goes for a second drink, still without offering anything to Anne. "You're not going to turn out to be one of those drunken detectives, are you?" she asks "anxiously." Marlowe confidently replies, "Why not? They always solve their cases and they never even sweat."⁶⁴

In addition to alcoholic thirst, Marlowe also denies Anne's sexual appetite while expressing his own. When Anne shows Marlowe Mrs. Grayle's stunning photograph and explains that she has set up a meeting for Marlowe and Mrs. Grayle that afternoon, Marlowe jokes about sleeping with the wealthy blonde. In addition to sharing Mrs. Grayle's photograph with Marlowe, Anne notes that when she called Mrs. Grayle to set up the meeting, "she sounded as if she had a hangover."⁶⁵ Indeed, as much as Marlowe expresses his sexual and alcoholic desires during his morning meeting with Anne, Mrs. Grayle just as quickly and more emphatically expresses and acts upon her own when Marlowe meets with her that afternoon.

To return to the scene at the Grayle residence that afternoon: after noting that Anne now has a drink but otherwise appears the same as she had at their earlier meeting, Marlowe describes Mr. and Mrs. Lewin Lockridge Grayle—up to this point, Helen's first name is unknown to Marlowe—in terms that recall the juxtaposition of General and

⁶⁴ Chandler, *Farewell*, 93.

⁶⁵ Chandler, *Farewell*, 94.

Vivian Sternwood. Mr. Grayle is “a tall thin sad-faced man with a stony chin and deep eyes and no color in his face but an unhealthy yellow. He was a good sixty, or rather a bad sixty. He wore a dark business suit, a red carnation, and looked subdued.” After thus quickly dispatching with his observation of the spent, sallow old man, Marlowe lingers on Mrs. Grayle’s appearance for a long paragraph. “She was dressed to go out,” but Marlowe doesn’t spend much time describing her dress because “She had a full set of curves which nobody had been able to improve upon.” “The effect” of her outfit is “to make her look very young,” Marlowe having earlier guessed from her photograph that she is about thirty, “and to make her lapis lazuli eyes look very blue. Her hair was of the gold of old paintings.... She was giving me one of her smiles. She looked as if she smiled easily, but her eyes had a still look, as if they thought slowly and carefully. And her mouth was sensual.”⁶⁶

Having established the contrast between the yellow old man and his golden young wife, in the proceeding scene Chandler elaborates that the differences within the couple amount to more than a three-decades difference in age. “Mix Mr. Marlowe a drink, honey,” Mrs. Grayle commands. “Mr. Grayle shook hands with me,” Marlowe narrates. “His hand was cold and a little moist. His eyes were sad. He mixed a Scotch and soda and handed it to me. Then he sat down in a corner and was silent.” While “apparently Mr. Grayle didn’t drink,” Mrs. Grayle just as apparently does, ordering a refill for herself and Marlowe—who finishes his drink in two big swallows—moments after asking Mr. Grayle to mix Marlowe’s first Scotch and soda. In requesting this second round of drinks, Mrs. Grayle is just as impersonal and impolite with her waitstaff as Vivian Sternwood is

⁶⁶ Chandler, *Farewell*, 123-24.

with hers. “Mrs. Grayle rang a bell set into the arm of the leather chesterfield and a footman came in. She half pointed to the tray. He looked around and mixed two drinks.... The footman went out.”⁶⁷

By contrast, when Mrs. Grayle implies that she wants Mr. Grayle to leave another moment later, “Mr. Grayle stood up and said he was very glad to have met me and that he would go and lie down for a while. He didn’t feel very well. He hoped I would excuse him. He was so polite I wanted to carry him out of the room just to show my appreciation.” The contrast in the politeness of the two Grayles’ interactions with others is significant, but Chandler further emphasizes how thoroughly his young wife has emasculated Mr. Grayle by describing his apology rather than presenting it as dialogue. After Mr. Grayle “closed the door softly, as if he was afraid to wake a sleeper,” Mrs. Grayle “drank a sip or two, then finished her glass at a swallow and set it aside. ‘To hell with this polite drinking,’ she said suddenly. ‘Let’s get together on this.’”⁶⁸ That on which she wants to get together with Marlowe is, ostensibly, the search for her jade necklace, supposedly stolen on an evening out with Lindsay Marriott, who was apparently killed in an attempt to pay ransom for the valuable piece. However, Mrs. Grayle proceeds to ask Marlowe how “a very good-looking man” like him got to be a detective, and continues to drink quickly while encouraging Marlowe to do the same. “Push that table over here, will you? So I can reach the drinks,” she requests. “I got up and pushed the huge silver tray on a stand across the glossy floor to her side. She made two more drinks. I still had half of my second.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Chandler, *Farewell*, 124.

⁶⁸ Chandler, *Farewell*, 125.

⁶⁹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 126.

Notably absent from all this conversation and drinking is Anne Riordan, whom Mrs. Grayle excludes and treats with some (politely stated) suspicion until she finally leaves. “Anne Riordan stood up. She carried her glass, still full, over to the tray and set it down. ‘You probably won’t run short,’ she said. ‘But if you do—.’”⁷⁰ While at the Grayle residence on the same business as Marlowe, Anne feels a need or desire to stay sober while appearing to be convivial that Marlowe clearly does not feel, accepting but not actually consuming the drink offered to her. This unique drinking behavior is not driven solely by professionalism, however: in every drinking scene Anne Riordan shares with Marlowe—and there is drinking in all but one of their shared scenes—Anne either pours herself a drink that she does not touch or skips this pretense altogether. In Chandler’s modern Los Angeles, where women are driven by the twin desires to drink greedily and/or control men’s drinking behaviors, Anne Riordan manages (almost entirely) to constrain both these forms of her feminine greed only by thus grudgingly tolerating Marlowe’s heavy drinking while demonstrating mild disapproval.

Throughout Marlowe’s visit, Mrs. Grayle does the opposite, both drinking heavily and attempting to control Marlowe’s drinking by persuading him to excess. In doing so, she ultimately reveals herself to Marlowe and the reader as the novel’s *femme fatale* by creating a tableau that encapsulates what Chandler identifies as the great evil of modernity: masculine bonds torn asunder by transgressive feminine (alcoholic and sexual) greed.

While answering Marlowe’s questions about her necklace, her relationship with Lindsay Marriott, and other facts relevant to her potential employment of Marlowe as a

⁷⁰ Chandler, *Farewell*, 126.

private investigator, Mrs. Grayle repeatedly steers the conversation back to drinking and sex, encouraging Marlowe on both fronts. In sharp contrast to Anne's reaction to Marlowe's drinking that morning, and in an observation very much like one made by Jessie Florian, Mrs. Grayle reacts to Marlowe falling a drink behind her by observing, "You're not drinking."⁷¹ Though he does not specifically describe his own drinking after this challenge, it is likely that Marlowe then finishes at least one of the two glasses in front of him. In Marlowe's next mention of his drink(s), "She reached for my glass and her fingers touched mine a little, and were soft to the touch.... She poured a fat slug of mellow-looking Scotch into my glass and squirted in some fizz-water. It was the kind of liquor you think you can drink forever, and all you do is get reckless. She gave herself the same treatment."⁷²

Marlowe acknowledges not only that he is at risk of getting more recklessly drunk than he intends, but also that he might be more susceptible to Mrs. Grayle's sexual intoxication than is professionally or, more importantly, morally viable. Chandler reiterates the connection between the two varieties of intoxication when Marlowe replies to Mrs. Grayle's description of her outfit the evening her necklace was stolen by saying, "I bet you looked a dream." The frankness of the compliment prompts Mrs. Grayle to ask, "You're not getting a little tight, are you?" Marlowe answers frankly, again: "I've been known to be soberer." Mrs. Grayle apparently approves: after a few more questions about the necklace, "She reached for my glass to refill it. I let her have it, even though it still had an inch to go. I studied the lovely lines of her neck."⁷³

⁷¹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 127.

⁷² Chandler, *Farewell*, 128-29.

⁷³ Chandler, *Farewell*, 129.

The more Marlowe pushes Mrs. Grayle to give him the details of a robbery that, the reader eventually learns, never happened, the more intoxicated they both get, until Marlowe is drinking as much and encouraging as much drinking as Mrs. Grayle. Meanwhile, both Marlowe and Mrs. Grayle encourage each other sexually. Marlowe moves to sit next to Mrs. Grayle on the couch. As she begins a narrative recreation of the robbery, “Have a drink” becomes their dialogue’s refrain.⁷⁴ Then, to indicate not only increasing rapidity but also increasing carelessness, the refrain moves to Marlowe’s narration, “We had a drink.”⁷⁵

When Mrs. Grayle has finished telling her story, Marlowe “sat with my empty glass in my hand and thought. She took it away from me and started to fill it again. I took the refilled glass out of her hand and transferred it to my left and took hold of her left hand with my right.”⁷⁶ The refrain becomes Marlowe and Mrs. Grayle squeezing each other’s hand, until Marlowe finally has all the information he desires from Mrs. Grayle. She asks Marlowe for his first name, and Marlowe asks for hers. She answers, “Helen. Kiss me.”⁷⁷ Helen Grayle falls “softly across [Marlowe’s] lap,” and they begin to kiss. Just a moment later, they are interrupted:

The door opened and Mr. Grayle stepped quietly into the room. I was holding her and didn’t have a chance to let go. I lifted my face and looked at him. I felt as cold as Finnegan’s feet, the day they buried him.

⁷⁴ Chandler, *Farewell*, 131-32.

⁷⁵ Chandler, *Farewell*, 133.

⁷⁶ Chandler, *Farewell*, 133.

⁷⁷ Chandler, *Farewell*, 135.

The blonde in my arms didn't move, didn't even close her lips. She had a half-dreamy, half-sarcastic expression on her face.

Mr. Grayle cleared his throat slightly and said: 'I beg your pardon, I'm sure,' and went quietly out of the room. There was an infinite sadness in his eyes.

I pushed her away and stood up and got my handkerchief out and mopped my face....

"Who was that?" she asked thickly.

"Mr. Grayle"

"Forget him."⁷⁸

Marlowe does not reveal the solution to the mystery of Lindsay Marriott's death until he confronts Helen Grayle herself at the novel's climax, but readers familiar with the *femme fatale* character type would know by the time Marlowe is caught in the act by Mr. Grayle that something is very badly amiss with Mrs. Grayle.

Specifically, she has involved Marlowe in the ultimate feminine transgression: by controlling Marlowe's drinking and sexuality and expressing her own too-hearty alcoholic and sexual appetites, she has made him an accomplice in a betrayal of masculine bonds. Though he agrees to meet Helen again later that night, it seems likely that Marlowe has no intention of actually showing up. "I was still cold," Marlowe explains. "I felt nasty, as if I had picked a poor man's pocket."⁷⁹ It can hardly be an accident that Chandler uses this particular simile to describe Marlowe's betrayal of the

⁷⁸ Chandler, *Farewell*, 135.

⁷⁹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 136.

novel's most ostentatiously wealthy character. Once again, bonds of brotherhood are stronger than working-class ties.

Conclusion: “Nice-Tough Guys”

Helen Grayle escapes after killing Moose but ends up back where she started. When she is finally found in Baltimore, where she dies in a standoff with police, she has gone back to being what Velma Valento was: a night club singer. By the gendered logic of *Farewell, My Lovely*, death or imprisonment alone would not be a satisfying end for Helen Grayle. She first has to be stripped of all she had gained by her corrupting feminine intrusion into the masculine public sphere. Her talents as a singer put her in a position to seduce the owner of a radio station and take his place as the head of the household on the canyon side of Aster Drive. In the end, though, Chandler ensures that she dies with nothing more than her singing talent.

Chandler may not have borne so much malice for his real-life friend and literary agent Helga Greene as he seems to have for his fictional creation Helen Grayle. Tellingly, though, Marlowe seems to enjoy the company of Laird Brunette, *Farewell's* fictional proprietor of gambling houses, just about as much as Chandler himself would come to enjoy the company of “Lucky” Luciano. Indeed, if Moose Malloy was too ideally masculine and convivial to survive in feminized modern Los Angeles, Laird Brunette is a convivial masculine realist. His role in *Farewell's* plot is so minor—as the owner of the gambling boat upon which Moose hides for a short time—that Chandler seems to have included his character mostly to illustrate the best a man can be in the corrupt, feminized

modern world. Like most of his encounters with other men, Marlowe's introduction to Brunette is tense but hopeful, both of them seemingly eager for a homosocial connection.

Brunette is a mobster and Marlowe has snuck onto his boat with a gun, so they have good reason to beware one another. Even so, each seems to want to grant the other the benefit of the doubt. "He had a cat smile, but I like cats," Marlowe narrates. "I thought his pearl was a little too large, but that might have been jealousy."⁸⁰ Most representative of Brunette's character as one of Chandler's modern ideal "nice-tough guys" is his offer of an honest drink, even before Marlowe has explained how and why he got on to Brunette's boat carrying a weapon.⁸¹ Watching one of Brunette's henchmen tend bar, Marlowe narrates: "The gorilla mixed a couple at the little bar. He didn't try to hide the glasses while he did it."⁸² After Marlowe has explained himself and asked Brunette to deliver a note to Moose, Brunette asks Marlowe who helped him get on the boat armed. "'I could make you tell,' he said, and immediately shook his head. 'No. I believed you once. I'll believe you again. Sit still and have another drink.'⁸³

Rather than Moose Malloy's brand of convivial masculinity, whereby the ideal of men being able to share drinks and each other's company wherever they like comes up against the violent reality of the corrupted modern public sphere, the wary, incomplete, and fleeting conviviality that Marlowe shares with Brunette on a boat anchored far from Los Angeles is about the best that men can hope for, according to Chandler's vision of a feminized post-Prohibition urban America. Physical features aside, Chandler might as

⁸⁰ Chandler, *Farewell*, 263.

⁸¹ Chandler, *Farewell*, 269.

⁸² Chandler, *Farewell*, 264.

⁸³ Chandler, *Farewell*, 269.

well be describing “Lucky” Luciano when Marlowe describes Brunette as “a small and somehow very human yellow-eyed man who was a racketeer and probably worse.”⁸⁴

Perhaps gangsters are the next best men that Chandler/Marlowe can find in a time and place that kills soldiers.

Far from offering the political solutions of proletarian literature, Chandler’s early Philip Marlowe novels, much like Hammett’s *Red Harvest*, paint a bleak tableau of a fallen world with little to point the way to a better future, beyond the promise of a rare shared drink with masculine company. More than *Red Harvest*, however, *Farewell, My Lovely* identifies the enemy of its author’s imagined convivial masculine past in the excessive feminine appetites that have corrupted and deformed the novel’s modern urban public sphere. Even as Chandler thus hardened the reactionary prejudices of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity, Richard Wright began turning heavy-drinking hard-boiled conventions against Chandler and a genre that denied the humanity of black masculine conviviality.

⁸⁴ Chandler, *Farewell*, 272.

Chapter Four

“She Doubled Up with Laughter. He Tightened with Hate”: Drinking, Detection, and

Double Consciousness in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*

American hard-boiled detective fictions feature a scene so common it could be called a convention of the genre. The premise is so simple it could be the set-up for a tasteless joke: a white man walks into a black bar. *Farewell, My Lovely* includes the first instance of this conventional scene in a novel by one of the genre’s major writers. In this scene, as I describe in chapter 3, Moose Malloy drags Philip Marlowe into Florian’s despite Marlowe’s protests that Florian’s is a “colored joint.” Moose and Marlowe’s experience of Florian’s mostly serves to illustrate that the white working-class world Moose knew when he was incarcerated eight years earlier is gone, the vacuum it left now filled with “the dead alien silence of another race.”¹ After Moose flees the scene, his killing of Florian’s proprietor, Sam Montgomery, fades into obscurity as merely a catalyst for Marlowe’s investigation. He returns only very briefly to Watts in his search for the runaway Moose and Velma Valento, the white nightclub singer Moose had expected to find at what used to be a white drinking place.

Sean McCann argues that Chandler at “the opening of *Farewell, My Lovely* aimed to illuminate and to cut against precisely the racism for which Chandler was later castigated.” To support this claim, McCann points to the contrast between Marlowe’s reaction and that of the even less sympathetic police officer Captain Nulty to a “shine killing,” as well as to Marlowe’s later successful interview with the black desk clerk at

¹ Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 6, 7.

the Hotel Sans Souci. However, McCann concludes his tepid defense of Chandler by acknowledging that “*Farewell, My Lovely* reeks of prejudice, and it provides an excellent example of the way that a certain variety of paternalistic sympathy can turn quickly to exploitation. In addition, by casting white brotherhood against alien silence, the opening passage of *Farewell, My Lovely* certainly points to the symbolic potency of racial division.”²

While the intrusion of a white man into a black drinking place has symbolic potency for a white hard-boiled crime writer like Raymond Chandler, this conventional scene is of central narrative importance to many hard-boiled detective narratives by African American writers. Walter Mosley’s *Devil in a Blue Dress*, for instance, begins with private eye-to-be Easy Rawlins declaring, “I was surprised to see a white man walk into Joppy’s bar.”³ That white man, DeWitt Albright, hires Easy to find Daphne Monet, a white woman who “has a predilection for the company of Negroes. She likes jazz and pigs’ feet and dark meat, if you know what I mean.... But, you see, I can’t go in those places looking for her because I’m not the right persuasion.”⁴ Before Mosley, Chester Himes began a number of novels in his hard-boiled Harlem detectives series with a white man conspicuously entering a black bar or restaurant, often to indulge socially unacceptable and/or illegal sexual appetites.⁵

² Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 160, 162.

³ Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990; New York: Washington Square Press, 2002), 45.

⁴ Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, 63.

⁵ Chester Himes, *The Real Cool Killers* (1959; New York: Vintage, 1988); Chester Himes, *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969; New York: Vintage, 1989).

In the hands of these African American authors of detective fiction, racial division becomes something more concrete than Chandler's racist symbol of capitalistic modernity's ever-shifting center. While Hammett and Chandler employed the increasingly elusive conviviality of all-male drinking places as a nostalgic symbol in their despairing, gendered modernist critiques, Himes and Mosley emphasize the racial boundaries of drinking places, using the conventions of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity to make realist critiques of American race relations. These critiques emerge, in part, from a clear understanding among fictional black detectives that their drinking means something other than what Philip Marlowe's or the Continental Op's drinking means for their characters. Without denying the gender implications of heavy-drinking hard-boiled semiotics, Himes and Mosley implicitly and explicitly challenge the assumed whiteness of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity.

To get a fuller sense of why black detectives do not build an aura of honesty, integrity, and strength from the symbolism of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity, we need to consider texts related to, but somewhat outside, the hard-boiled detective genre. At the same time that Chandler was using black men as mere symbols of a changing modern capitalist landscape, Richard Wright provided a Marxist critique of American race relations by revealing in *Native Son* (a novel published, like *Farewell, My Lovely*, in 1940) the full human depths of Bigger Thomas, a young black man who becomes merely a racist symbol to white Chicagoans. Wright's appreciation of detective fiction, Himes's emulation of Wright's fiction, and the prominence of an anxious attempt at interracial conviviality in a black drinking place in *Native Son* all beckon for a closer reading of the novel in relation to the development of an African American hard-boiled detective

tradition in the second half of the twentieth century, especially in terms of racism's role in diminishing the symbolic potency of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity.

By prefacing Bigger's accidental killing of Mary Dalton with a night of heavy double-conscious drinking, Richard Wright subverts the racism of the American detective fiction he admired. While drinking serves only a very basic function for his black characters, rendering them both blind to their oppression and sexually available to each other, the scene of Bigger's unwanted night out with Jan and Mary speaks volumes beyond what Chandler glibly interprets as "the dead alien silence of another race." Wright's rendering of Bigger's night out with Jan and Mary, particularly their stop at Ernie's Kitchen Shack, provides a subaltern response to Chandler's dehumanizing metaphorical use of a black drinking space in *Farewell, My Lovely*. This response resonates in African American detective fiction from Chester Himes's Harlem detectives series through Walter Mosley's Chandleresque Easy Rawlins mysteries. Wright's humanizing narration of Bigger's fear during a night of drinking in unwanted white company sets the stage for African American hard-boiled writers' reframing of Chandler's famous opening scene in *Farewell, My Lovely*.

Furthermore, Wright's depiction of white responses to Bigger's actions, with their unrelenting emphasis on drunkenness and rape anchored in racist myth, also sets the foundation for hard-boiled black detectives who do not benefit from the symbolism of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity. Therefore, rather than perpetuate the symbolism of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity, black authors of hard-boiled fiction from Richard Wright through Walter Mosley instead diminish the aura of heavy-drinking hard-boiled white masculinity by turning the black gaze on the ham-fisted foolishness of the

white detectives in their texts. At the same time, Himes's and Mosley's black detectives develop their own, specifically black masculine hard-boiled aura by remaining generally sober and, to the degree necessary, maintaining authority through violence.

***Native Son* and/as Detective Fiction**

While *Native Son* is most commonly associated with realism, naturalism, and African American fiction, many critics have noted the relevance of detective fiction to Wright's novel and its reception. Doyle Walls points out Wright's significant word choices in this response to a critic of *Native Son*:

If there had been *one* person in the Dalton household who viewed Bigger Thomas as a human being, the crime would have been solved in half an hour. Did not Bigger himself know that it was the denial of his personality that enabled him to escape detection so long? The one piece of incriminating evidence which would have solved the "murder mystery" was Bigger's humanity, and the Daltons, Britten, and the newspaper men could not see or admit the living clue of Bigger's humanity under their very eyes!⁶

Walls argues that, since Wright speaks of *Native Son* here so thoroughly in the terms of detective fiction—indeed, he describes *Native Son* as if it *were* a detective novel—"a reading based on conventions of the detective story might well be profitable." Walls further cites Wright's long personal interest in mystery and detective fiction and Robert

⁶ Qtd. in Doyle W. Walls, "The Clue Undetected in Richard Wright's *Native Son*," *American Literature* 57, no. 1 (March 1985): 126, doi: 10.2307/2926318.

Felgar's argument for "how much Wright's fiction owes to the conventions of the detective story."⁷

Mark Madigan also cites Wright's lifelong enthusiasm for detective and crime fiction in his brief study of a literary curiosity: Wright's blurb on the jacket of Jim Thompson's first novel, *Now and on Earth*, published in 1942. Madigan examines some fascinating parallels between the lives and careers of Thompson the pulp crime writer and Wright the literary celebrity to explain why the latter praised the little-known Thompson's first novel as "a document as true and direct as a birth or death certificate." In addition to describing thematic similarities between the two writers' work, Madigan suggests that "since Thompson published stories in magazines such as *Daring Detective*, *Master Detective*, and *True Detective* early in his career, it is conceivable that Wright became acquainted with his work in these periodicals." Madigan provides support for this claim from noted Wright scholar Michael Fabre, who argues that Wright "owes his spiritual survival [as a youth] in racist Mississippi and, in part, his vocation as a writer to detective stories, popular fiction, and dime novels."⁸

In addition to being an avid reader of popular detective fiction, Wright was, according to Charles Scruggs, "an inveterate moviegoer." Scruggs argues that the influence of 1930s gangster movies is especially evident in *Native Son*, elaborating specifically on the often-striking parallels between the novel and the 1938 gangster film

⁷ Doyle W. Walls, "The Clue Undetected in Richard Wright's *Native Son*," *American Literature* 57, no. 1 (March 1985): 126, doi: 10.2307/2926318.

⁸ Mark J. Madigan, "'As True and Direct as a Birth or Death Certificate': Richard Wright on Jim Thompson's *Now and on Earth*," *Studies in American Fiction* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 105, 107, doi: 10.1353/saf.1994.0015.

Angels with Dirty Faces.⁹ Among the more recent studies of crime-centric popular culture's seminal influence on *Native Son* is Robert Butler's reevaluation of the Loeb and Leopold case as an antecedent to the novel.¹⁰ Given Wright's wide-ranging and intense fascination with both crime fact and fiction, it comes as no surprise that *Native Son*'s high initial sales were driven in part by readers' anticipation of a thrilling detective story.¹¹

But those high sales dropped off, and many of the scholars who have elucidated the tight connections between *Native Son* and crime fiction also (if indirectly) suggest reasons why readers expecting detective fiction were disappointed by the novel's inevitable subversion of genre conventions. Maureen Reddy argues that "the foundational but often covert premise of the traditional hard-boiled is that the core US value – whiteness – is under siege and requires defense."¹² My arguments regarding canonical hard-boiled writers in the previous two chapters suggest that the fears and regrets at the heart of hard-boiled detective fiction are not quite so easily summarized. Hard-boiled fiction is premised at least as much, for instance, on fears of virtuous masculinity under attack. However, it is nonetheless true that American hard-boiled detective fiction traditionally values *white* masculinity above and even against femininity and seemingly without recognition of black masculinity. Wright probably disappointed genre fans

⁹ Charles Scruggs, *Sweet Home: Invisible Cities in the Afro-American Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 95-97.

¹⁰ Robert Butler, "The Loeb and Leopold Case: A Neglected Source for Richard Wright's *Native Son*," *African American Review* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2005), 555-567, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40033693>.

¹¹ Arnold Rampersad, introduction to *Native Son: The Restored Text Established by the Library of America*, by Richard Wright (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), xxi.

¹² Maureen T. Reddy, "Race and American Crime Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. Catherine Ross Nickerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143.

simply by telling a crime story wherein the main character is a black criminal, thereby acknowledging Bigger's humanity in a way that Chandler was unable or unwilling to do for the black men in Florian's. Indeed, as Walls points out, Wright consciously constructed a crime novel in which the most obvious clues, like Bigger's use of Black English Vernacular in his ransom note, go unnoticed by white observers because those white men and women do not see Bigger as fully human.¹³ In writing such a crime novel, Wright broadened the genre beyond its narrow racial limits by suggesting the possibility of black hard-boiled detectives who uncover the ways in which "blackness is *always* under siege by whiteness," as Reddy argues that Easy Rawlins and other recent detectives do.¹⁴

Heavy Drinking and Hard-Boiled Black Masculinity

Creating black hard-boiled heroes meant more than simply making the detectives' faces black, as Chester Himes perhaps disingenuously claimed he did with his Harlem detective duo, Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones.¹⁵ Indeed, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed frequently and often explicitly respond to the institutional racism of postwar America in their constructions of authoritative hard-boiled personae as black men. For instance, their introduction in *A Rage in Harlem*, the first novel in the Harlem detectives series (originally published as *For Love of Imabelle* in 1957), emphasizes the violence they must threaten in order to be taken seriously as representatives of the overwhelmingly white police force by the overwhelmingly black population of Harlem: "Grave Digger

¹³ Walls, "Clue Undetected," 125-28.

¹⁴ Reddy, "Race and American Crime Fiction," 143.

¹⁵ Reddy, "Race and American Crime Fiction," 140-41.

and Coffin Ed weren't crooked detectives, but they were tough. They had to be tough to work in Harlem. Colored folks didn't respect colored cops. But they respected big shiny pistols and sudden death. It was said in Harlem that Coffin Ed's pistol would kill a rock and that Grave Digger's would bury it."¹⁶ Throughout the Harlem detectives series, Himes reiterates the necessity of the duo's performance of toughness.

One of the subtler differences between Hammett's and Chandler's white private eyes and Himes's black police detectives is the latter's much more limited interest in drinking. Indeed, those who drink to excess in the Harlem detectives series are generally minor, disreputable, or outright evil characters. These include informants, heroin-addicted prostitutes,¹⁷ violent drunks, and white sexual predators.¹⁸ When Grave Digger and Coffin Ed do drink heavily, it is under exceptional circumstances. For instance, after quelling a potential riot in the 1965 novel *Cotton Comes to Harlem* on what had earlier promised to be a quiet Sunday, Grave Digger tells Cotton Ed, "All I want to do is go out and break some laws. Other people have all the fun.... Let's take the ladies to some unlicensed joint run by some wanted criminal and drink some stolen whisky."¹⁹ Likewise, though Easy Rawlins drinks heavily when unemployed in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, he sobers up considerably once he begins to accept his new informal vocation as a detective.

Deliberately or not, Himes and Mosley respond to racist American myths about drunken black men, sexuality, and violence in their development of their detectives' masculine characters in terms of drinking behavior. Given the scope of such myths'

¹⁶ Chester Himes, *A Rage in Harlem* (1957; New York: Vintage, 1991), 49.

¹⁷ Chester Himes, *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965; New York: Vintage, 1988), 35-38.

¹⁸ Chester Himes, *The Real Cool Killers* (1959; New York: Vintage, 1988), 5-8.

¹⁹ Himes, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, 117.

influence in American culture after the Civil War and Reconstruction, they could hardly do otherwise. D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) remains the most famous racist depiction of drunken black men using authority granted them to pursue white women sexually. The film noxiously portrays what Griffith's intertitles claim is "an historical facsimile" of the 1871 session of the South Carolina House of Representatives, in which the overwhelmingly black majority—including members who openly swill from pints of whiskey—pass a bill "providing for the intermarriage of blacks and whites" as black legislators stare hungrily at two white women in the gallery. A black man's attempted rape of young, white Flora Cameron, who "found sweeter the opal gates of death" than submission to her attacker, sets off the film's climactic action by the Ku Klux Klan.

Of course, Griffith did not pioneer the racist myths of black alcoholic thirst, nor their association with sexuality and violence, nor the use of such myths to limit black men's access to even the most meager authority. In 1890, WCTU President Frances Willard, a Northerner living in Evanston, Illinois, proclaimed:

The Anglo-Saxon race will never submit to be dominated by the Negro so long as his altitude reaches no higher than the personal liberty of the saloon.... "Better whisky and more of it" has been the rallying cry of great dark-faced mobs in the Southern localities where local option was snowed under by the colored vote.... The colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt. The grog-shop is its center

of power. “The safety of woman, of childhood, of the home, is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment.”²⁰

If temperance leaders like Willard were willing to deploy racism in the service of their cause, unscrupulous liquor distributors were no more squeamish about fueling white fears in the service of profits. As Daniel Okrent describes, temperance advocates stoked a national outcry about the marketing of cheap liquor to black men in 1908. The scandal began when a black man charged with rape in Birmingham was found with a half-empty bottle of gin bearing the brand name “Black Cock Vigor” and an illustration of a white woman, “mostly nude,” on the label.²¹

Hammett and Chandler emphasize white masculine fears of women with power in their portrayals of manipulative alcoholic women vis-à-vis heavy-drinking but sober-acting white detectives. By contrast, Himes’s and Mosley’s portrayals of black men with the masculine moral authority of hard-boiled detectives necessarily play down the characters’ drinking, in recognition of long-lived American cultural myths that associate drunken black men with the abuse of masculine authority, particularly masculine sexual power. In the shadow of these powerful cultural myths, Coffin Ed, Grave Digger Jones, and Easy Rawlins can hardly use alcohol as an effective tool of social negotiation across racial lines, unlike Philip Marlowe in his questioning of the black clerk at the Hotel Sans Souci.

²⁰ Qtd. in Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings* (1892-1900; Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), 132-33.

²¹ Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 44-46.

Between Marlowe's foray into Watts (to him a silent alien landscape made fleetingly articulate by whiskey) and Coffin Ed and Grave Digger's sober, violent authority in Harlem stands Ernie's Kitchen Shack on the Southside of Chicago. There, Richard Wright dramatizes how the conviviality Marlowe finds in stolen moments is impossible across racial lines, no matter how noble the intentions of the white drinkers may be.

Drinking and Double Consciousness in *Native Son*

Native Son plays its seminal role in the establishment of an African American hard-boiled tradition by virtue of its prominent position in the broader African American literary canon. Arnold Rampersad argues, "If all of a nation's literature may stem from one book, as Hemingway implied about *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, then it can as accurately be said that all of Afro-American literature of a creative nature has proceeded from Du Bois's comprehensive statement on the nature of the people in *The Souls of Black Folk*."²² To be sure, *Native Son* as well as the hard-boiled detective fiction that followed it grapples productively with Du Bois's key concept of double consciousness. Du Bois's much-quoted summary of the concept therefore bears repeating here:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a

²² Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 89.

peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.²³

Many critics note the positive aspect of double consciousness in addition to the more readily apparent negative. Double consciousness means that one is made to feel as an outsider, constantly measuring oneself by another's terms. At the same time, though, that outsider status is “an endowment of ‘second-sight,’ that seems to allow a deeper or redoubled comprehension of the complexities of ‘this American world.’”²⁴ As Cynthia Hamilton emphasizes, hard-boiled detective fiction is a likely venue for the further literary development of this positive aspect of double consciousness: “The hardboiled detective often exhibits an unwillingness to accept the corrupt social ethics of his society or to compromise himself to get by. As a result of this conflict in values, the detective always displays a type of double consciousness.”²⁵

However, an examination of *Native Son* in terms of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity reveals at least one manner in which African American hard-boiled detective fiction still bears the weight of “a world which yields [black men] no true self-

²³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), e-book.

²⁴ Brent Hayes Edwards, introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W. E. B. Du Bois (1903; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), e-book.

²⁵ Cynthia S. Hamilton, “The Signifying Monkey and the Colloquial Detective: Reading African American Detective Fiction,” *Forecast* 15 (2005), 227.

consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.” Indeed, *Native Son* dramatizes Wright’s concept that, for black men and women, drinking is rarely more than a means of evading consciousness, while for whites it is a means of enhancing convivial social consciousness. Jan and Mary’s attempt to drink convivially with Bigger dramatizes the divide between these two understandings of heavy drinking, thereby providing a narrative key to the difference in alcoholic semiotics between white- and African American-authored hard-boiled detective fictions: while heavy drinking enhances the appearance of white masculine hard-boiled moral authority, drinking threatens to diminish the appearance of black detectives’ moral authority.

In a moment of clarity after Bigger confesses his crime to her, Bigger’s girlfriend Bessie effectively summarizes Wright’s understanding of alcohol use in Chicago’s Black Belt:

“All my life’s been full of hard trouble. If I wasn’t hungry, I was sick. And if I wasn’t sick, I was in trouble. I ain’t never bothered nobody. I just worked hard every day as long as I can remember, till I was tired enough to drop; then I had to get drunk to forget it. I had to get drunk to sleep. That’s all I ever did. And now I’m in this.... All you ever caused me was trouble, just plain black trouble. All you ever did since we been knowing each other was to get me drunk so’s you could have me. That was all! I see it now. I ain’t drunk now.... I been a fool, just a blind dumb black drunk fool.”²⁶

²⁶ Richard Wright, *Native Son: The Restored Text Established by the Library of America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 229-30.

This idea of drinking not only as one of African Americans' few options for momentary escape, but also as a means of continued exploitation by others, has a long history in American letters. Frederick Douglass argued, in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), that the six days of the holiday break from Christmas to New Year's day, during which slave owners encouraged their slaves in whisky-soaked dissipation, were "among the most effective means in the hands of the slaveholder in keeping down the spirit of insurrection.... These holidays serve as conductors, or safety-valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity."²⁷ Likewise, paternalistic though her novel may be, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) Harriet Beecher Stowe strikes a similar tone to Bessie's through the character of Prue. This elderly slave explains to Tom that she will probably drink herself to death to keep from thinking about her child, who died as an infant due to her master's neglect. "I tuck to drinkin', to keep its crying out of my ears! I did,—and I will drink! I will, if I do go to torment for it! Mas'r says I shall go to torment, and I tell him I've got thar now!"²⁸

In "How 'Bigger' Was Born," a talk he delivered at Columbia University shortly after *Native Son's* publication, Wright himself applied this understanding of African American alcohol use to the Jim Crow South of his youth. After describing five different "Bigger Thomases," boys and men Wright knew growing up who exhibited the defiance and rebelliousness that he would fictionalize to create *Native Son's* Bigger Thomas, Wright describes "variations in the Bigger Thomas pattern." These "variations" are

²⁷ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, in *Classic American Autobiographies*, ed. William L. Andrews (1845; New York: Mentor, 1992), 291.

²⁸ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852; New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), 324.

actually forms of “compensatory nourishment” that, as Wright describes, other blacks in the Jim Crow South sought in place of Bigger’s outright defiance of the “glitter” of the “dominant civilization” to which blacks were so close while being denied its comforts and rewards. “Some of the Negroes living under these conditions got religion, felt that Jesus would redeem the void of living, felt that the more bitter life was in the present the happier it would be in the hereafter.... Others projected their hurts and longings into more naïve and mundane forms—blues, jazz, swing.... Many labored under hot suns and then killed the restless ache with alcohol.”²⁹

In *Native Son* itself, Bigger comes to recognize heavy drinking as one of the means for blacks to make themselves blind to the full reality of their oppression, of a kind with religious devotion. Wright articulates this equivalence for Bigger: “he did not want to make believe that it was solved, make believe that he was happy when he was not. He hated his mother for that way of hers which was like Bessie’s. What his mother had was Bessie’s whiskey, and Bessie’s whiskey was his mother’s religion.”³⁰ Instead of making himself thus blind, Bigger wants to “answer the call of the dominant civilization,” like the Bigger Thomases Wright describes in his Columbia University address.³¹ As the narrator puts it in *Native Son*, “It was when he read the newspapers or magazines, went to the movies, or walked along the streets with crowds, that he felt what he wanted: to merge himself with others and be a part of this world, to lose himself in it so he could find himself, to be allowed a chance to live like others, even though he was black.”³²

²⁹ Richard Wright, “How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” in *Native Son: The Restored Text Established by the Library of America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 439.

³⁰ Wright, *Native Son*, 240.

³¹ Wright, “How Bigger Was Born,” 439.

³² Wright, *Native Son*, 240.

The Bigger Thomases whom Wright knew in his youth managed, in a limited way, to live like others “for a sweet brief spell.” However, as with the fictional Bigger Thomas, “eventually, the whites who restricted their lives made them pay a terrible price.”³³ A close examination of Bigger’s drinking, in juxtaposition with Jan and Mary’s, reveals layers of boundaries between prosperous white Chicago and the poor Chicago Black Belt beyond even the many articulated in Wright’s third-person narration. Bigger could never live like white others. His world is so limited and distorted by his oppression that he cannot even *drink* like those others. According to his understanding, black men and women drink only to blind themselves to their oppression. Prosperous whites, meanwhile, do not need alcohol to achieve this end. They are already blind to the full reality of black oppression and live comfortably enough themselves that they can use alcohol to enhance, rather than anesthetize, their social interactions. To put it another way, Jan and Mary just want to be convivial with Bigger, but Bigger, knowing alcohol only as a means of escape, has no concept of conviviality. Neither party understands the other’s alcoholic language, both drink deeper to try to achieve their impossible ends, and all finally suffer death or heartbreak for their efforts.

“She doubled up with laughter. He tightened with hate.”

Bigger first gets a strong feeling of double consciousness when he walks out of the Black Belt to enter the Daltons’ neighborhood. Though he has walked mere blocks from his home, he perceives this unfamiliar area as “a cold and distant world; a world of

³³ Wright, “How Bigger Was Born,” 437.

white secrets carefully guarded.”³⁴ While many of his initial experiences of the Dalton home prolong and enhance the “fear and emptiness” he feels just walking up to the house, he enjoys some moments of peace and hope for his future there as well. These he experiences primarily when he is given time alone, however, and once he is faced with an entire evening in the close company of Mary Dalton and her boyfriend Jan Erlone, Bigger’s fear and distrust of the white world and its many unknowns come roaring back to his consciousness.

Though he has mostly experienced the white world remotely, through popular culture and the stories of friends who work in white homes, Bigger has long understood whites to be his oppressors. He sneers at the billboard of Buckley, the State’s Attorney, pointing and declaring to denizens of the Black Belt, “YOU CAN’T WIN!”³⁵ However, Bigger can at least make sense of this relationship between the black and white worlds. Though he becomes frustrated with himself for acting in an extremely deferential manner in the presence of Mr. Dalton, he is mostly prepared to accept the Daltons’ paternalism. When Mary Dalton tries to engage with him as a social equal, however, Bigger is simply mystified. As Jan eventually comes to understand, he and Mary share in the blame for the failed social interaction. In their overexertion to act as though there is nothing unusual in socializing with a black chauffeur, Jan and Mary are often as paternalistic as Mr. Dalton, if not more naively so.

The evening of attempted conviviality across racial lines begins when Mary throws Bigger into a small panic by asking him to drive her to Jan’s office, rather than the

³⁴ Wright, *Native Son*, 44.

³⁵ Wright, *Native Son*, 13.

university lecture she had told her father she would be attending. “I think I can trust you.... After all, I’m on your side,” she claims without explanation. “I’m going to meet a friend of mine who’s also a friend of yours,” she adds self-assuredly. Mere hours after the Daltons hire Bigger as their driver, Mary complicates the professional relationship Bigger just agreed to have with the family. Unsurprisingly, Bigger assumes Mary wants something from him, all the more because of the awkward manner of confidence she adopts in attempting to move past the color line that separates them. As Wright narrates, Bigger “felt something in her over and above the fear she inspired in him. She responded to him as if he were human, as if he lived in the same world as she. And he had never felt that before in a white person. But why? Was this some kind of game?”³⁶

After Mary fetches Jan from his office, Bigger’s sense of being manipulated for some arcane white purpose only grows stronger. To be sure, Jan’s prodding of Bigger to take his offered hand by saying, “Come on and shake,” as he and Mary stand grinning in anticipation, recalls nothing so much as the training of a dog. Rather than calm Bigger’s suspicions, Jan’s paternalistic offers of camaraderie, such as his demand that Bigger call him Jan rather than “sir,” only further sharpen Bigger’s fears:

Were they making fun of him? What was it that they wanted? Why didn’t they leave him alone?... His entire mind and body were painfully concentrated into a single sharp point of attention. He was trying desperately to understand.... He was very conscious of his black skin and there was in him a prodding conviction that Jan and men like him had made it so that he would be conscious of that black skin.... Why was Mary standing there so eagerly, with shining eyes? What could

³⁶ Wright, *Native Son*, 64, 65.

they get out of this?... He felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to a black skin. It was a shadowy region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. He felt naked, transparent; he felt that this white man, having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused. At that moment he felt toward Mary and Jan a dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate.³⁷

Jan's command to "Let me drive awhile" does nothing to make Bigger feel less acutely this double-conscious sense of his own blackness. Sitting between Jan and Mary, "two vast white looming walls" on the front seat, he is all the more aware of his own black body.³⁸

Every attempt by Jan and Mary to share authentic experience with Bigger makes him feel ever less at ease in his own skin. These attempts culminate in their request that Bigger take them to a place where "we can get a good meal on the South Side." As Mary says, "We want to go to a *real* place," which Jan clarifies by adding, "Look, Bigger. We want one of those places where colored people eat, not one of those show places."³⁹ They pounce excitedly on his half-hearted recommendation of Ernie's Kitchen Shack, a name he offers without conceiving the possibility that Jan and Mary might actually want him to join them there for dinner. Bigger is unaware of how earnestly eager Jan and Mary are to connect with him (even if they just as earnestly wish to demonstrate the principles of the Communist Party to a potential recruit or fellow traveler). He is laser-focused by his

³⁷ Wright, *Native Son*, 66-67.

³⁸ Wright, *Native Son*, 67-68.

³⁹ Wright, *Native Son*, 69.

awareness and fear of the social reality of the troubling scene the three will make sitting together in the car, let alone in a restaurant “where colored people eat.” When they insist that he join them for dinner, Bigger’s refusals build up so much tension, based on fears that are so inscrutable to Jan and Mary, that Mary begins to cry as the three stand outside the restaurant. Tellingly, foreshadowing the evening’s eventual eruption into (accidental) violence, Mary’s tears begin after Bigger “stared at her in a long silence; it was the first time he had ever looked directly at her, and he was able to do so *only because he was angry*.... The way he had acted had made her cry, and yet the way she had acted had made him feel that he had to act as he had toward her. In his relations with her he felt that he was riding a seesaw; never were they on a common level; either he or she was up in the air.”⁴⁰

They enter the restaurant and Bigger simmers sulkily as Ernie’s patrons, including his friend Jack and his girlfriend Bessie, react with just as much surprise and confusion as Bigger anticipated. Bigger stewes in the stares of his friend, his girlfriend, and “the waitresses and several people at other tables” while waiting for the fried chicken and beer that Jan has ordered to arrive. When it does, Bigger tries to divert his attention to the food but finds that he cannot. “It seemed that the very organic functions of his body had altered; and when he realized why, when he understood the cause, he could not chew the food. After two or three bites, he stopped and sipped his beer.”⁴¹

In her subsequent prodding to “Eat your chicken” because “It’s good!,” Mary infantilizes Bigger in the same way that she and Jan have all evening, with overeager

⁴⁰ Wright, *Native Son*, 72 (my italics).

⁴¹ Wright, *Native Son*, 73-74.

delight in attempting to treat him as a social equal. Hence, his sulky, mumbled “I ain’t hungry” is an unsurprisingly childish response to their encouragement. Jan’s subsequent offer of more beer, after a prolonged, presumably awkward silence, seems to point a reasonable way forward. Perhaps Jan even recognizes this offer as a way to undo some of the infantilization of which he is guilty. At the very least, Jan’s offer indicates his understanding of shared drink as a relatively neutral way to form rudimentary masculine social bonds. Bigger’s calculation of Jan’s offer suggests a different interpretation. “Maybe if he got a little drunk it would help him,” Bigger thinks.⁴² If Bigger’s distrust of Jan and Mary were not so great that he articulates it, emotionally, as hate, it might be possible to interpret the “help” he seeks from alcohol as nothing more than a mild social lubricant. However, all of the fear that Wright has explained as the core of Bigger’s emotions throughout the evening leads to a different conclusion. Like his literary predecessors, Bigger wants to get drunk to numb himself to the traumatic experience of his own blackness in America, which the social proddings of Jan and Mary make him feel acutely.

Jan orders another round of beer, then a bottle (a fifth) of rum. The three diners do not speak while drinking their first two rounds of the rum. Finally, Jan begins asking Bigger about himself. His questions seem innocuous, but even simple questions like “How far did you go in school?” or “You live with your people?” yield troubling responses. When Bigger explains that he lives with his mother and siblings but not his father, who was killed in a riot when Bigger was a child, “There was silence. The rum

⁴² Wright, *Native Son*, 74.

was helping Bigger.”⁴³ The juxtaposition of these two sentences of exposition succinctly and precisely explains how both parties in the conversation are experiencing this dark revelation, without taking the reader outside Bigger’s point of view. Jan and Mary, having attempted to get to know Bigger through casual, friendly conversation, are caught off guard by the swiftness with which Jan’s questions lead to a revelation of hard circumstances determined by race. Bigger, on the other hand, having no convivial expectations for any conversation with whites, focuses on the numbing effect of the rum in the face of (what feel to him like) his interrogators.

Jan only deepens the social divide he is hereby surprised to find by turning the conversation to the Communist Party and its work on the Scottsboro Case, as evidence that he and Mary are on Bigger’s side (as Mary put it earlier). Tellingly, when Jan asks Bigger, regarding his father’s murder, “Don’t you think if we got together we could stop things like that?” Bigger responds (while “feeling the rum rising to his head”), “I don’t know.... There’s a lot of white people in the world.”⁴⁴ Jan fails to notice, even as Bigger shares drinks with him, that Bigger identifies Jan as part of the cause of his father’s death. Despite Jan and Mary’s modest efforts thus far, Bigger does not distinguish the two of them, or the Communist Party, from the broader white world that “don’t let us do *nothing*.”⁴⁵

Mary helps to blur the distinction between Jan’s pitch for Communist camaraderie and the couple’s efforts at social interaction across racial (and class) lines by adding simply, following the discussion of the Scottsboro Case, “we’d like to be friends of

⁴³ Wright, *Native Son*, 74.

⁴⁴ Wright, *Native Son*, 75.

⁴⁵ Wright, *Native Son*, 19.

yours.” Bigger reacts by silently draining his glass. “Jan poured another round. [Bigger] was getting drunk enough to look straight at them now.” Mary almost seems to understand how Bigger is feeling when she smiles at him and says, “You’ll get used to us.”⁴⁶

However, Mary’s next words change the meaning of this small offering of social comfort to a statement of social ownership. Jan stoppers the bottle of rum, putting a period on the conviviality for the moment as the three prepare to leave Ernie’s Kitchen Shack. Before Jan pays the bill, Mary tells Bigger about her trip to Detroit in the morning, requesting in the manner of an employer rather than a friend that Bigger bring her trunk to the train station at eight-thirty. If the reasons for Bigger’s discomfort and fear on this evening out with Jan and Mary were not already apparent, this jarring change in tone from the tipsy conversation of a friend to the commands of an employer clarify Bigger’s awkward, even dangerous position. Rather than the intended “I expect you’ll get used to us,” the reality of the social position Bigger holds relative to the Daltons warps Mary’s statement into a command: “You *will* get used to us.”

Upon their return to the car, the dynamic between the white couple in the backseat and Bigger in the front continues to demonstrate how incomplete are Jan and Mary’s earnest efforts to treat Bigger as an equal. The two kiss and cuddle in the backseat, acting as though they are alone except for Mary’s awkward inclusion of their chauffeur; she pauses to ask him, “You got a girl, Bigger?” When that question yields no more than a single brief response, Mary begins talking to Jan about the Communist Party. Perhaps in a further attempt to connect with Bigger, she tells Jan that she plans to join the Party upon

⁴⁶ Wright, *Native Son*, 75.

graduating and wants “to work among Negroes.... When I see what they’ve done to those people, it makes me *so mad*.... They have so much *emotion*! What a people! If we could ever get them going....”⁴⁷

Bigger is unmoved by Mary’s enthusiasm, possibly because his family rents their unsafe one-room apartment from Mary’s father. Despite Mary’s professed anger, Bigger has no reason to distinguish her from the “they” who have “done to [his] people.” The greatest irony of Jan and Mary’s dialogue regarding her plans to join the Party, though, is Jan’s response to Mary when she asks if he knows “many Negroes” because she wants “to meet some.” “I don’t know any very well,” Jan admits. “But you’ll meet them when you’re in the Party.”⁴⁸ Despite his own failure to get to know *any* black people as a prominent Communist, Jan still assures Mary that her experience in the Party will somehow be different. Jan and Mary emphasize the very little they know about African American culture when they begin singing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” to the wrong tune. Bigger refuses to join them, claiming, “I can’t sing,” and thereby countering Jan and Mary’s stereotypical understanding of blackness and black culture.⁴⁹ Mary is correct that Bigger is full of emotion, and she is actually, in a sense, getting him going. Her ignorance of the African American experience, however, makes her further ignorant of the fact that the emotions swelling in Bigger are fear and anger, building him up to eventual violent action.

Bigger’s refusal to join Jan and Mary in song leads to another period of silence followed by more drink. Just as in Ernie’s Kitchen Shack, Jan and Mary seek out

⁴⁷ Wright, *Native Son*, 75, 76-77.

⁴⁸ Wright, *Native Son*, 77.

⁴⁹ Wright, *Native Son*, 77.

intoxicated conviviality as a last-ditch effort against the inevitable failure of their simple social experiment. “Speaking in low tones,” Jan and Mary each take big drinks of rum from the bottle before offering it to Bigger, whose “two huge swallows” impress the couple. “Now and then he heard the half-empty bottle of rum gurgling. They getting plastered, he thought, feeling the effect of the rum creeping outward to his fingers and upward to his lips. Presently, he heard Mary giggle. Hell, she’s plastered already!”⁵⁰ Even though Bigger feels the numbing effect of the rum in his face and hands, he is thinking only of Jan and Mary as “getting plastered.”

There are several possible reasons why Bigger is not thinking of himself as drunk at this point and only admitting to himself shortly thereafter that “I’m almost drunk.” If nothing else, Bigger could simply be displaying masculine pride in his ability to hold his liquor (regardless of that liquor’s actual effect on his mind and body). However, Bigger’s later equation of drunkenness and religion as two means of achieving blindness, and Bessie’s accusation that Bigger only ever gives her alcohol “so’s you could have me,” are both crucial contextual clues for an understanding of Bigger’s definition of “plastered” in this scene. Importantly, Bigger does not decide confidently that Mary and Jan are drunk until their behavior becomes more explicitly sexual:

He looked at the mirror; Mary was lying flat on her back in the rear seat and Jan was bent over her. He saw a faint sweep of white thigh. They plastered all right, he thought.... He heard Jan whispering; then he heard them both sigh. Filled with a sense of them, his muscles grew gradually taut. He sighed and sat up straight,

⁵⁰ Wright, *Native Son*, 77-78.

fighting off the stiffening feeling in his loins. But soon he was slouched again. His lips were numb. I'm almost drunk, he thought.⁵¹

Rather than any number of symptoms specific to alcoholic overindulgence, it is the sight of Jan bending over Mary's exposed flesh that confirms for Bigger that "they plastered." Bigger only admits to himself that he might have had plenty to drink himself once he in turn becomes aroused, ultimately responding to Jan and Mary's (possibly orgasmic) sighs with a sigh of his own. Bigger only understands drunkenness as a source of social anesthesia and thereby as a tool of (sexual) manipulation. Hence, the only times during the evening when he determines that his unwanted companions are drunk are when they engage in sexual play in his presence or actually become physically incapacitated.

They both begin to show signs of the latter once Bigger finally lets Jan out of the car to catch a streetcar, and all three take turns finishing the bottle of rum. Jan and Mary's voices become thick, and Jan sways while searching his pockets for Communist Party pamphlets to give to Bigger. Having offered a final convivial swig to Bigger and laid the empty bottle in the gutter, Jan departs. Mary joins Bigger in the front seat. "Bigger's head was spinning" and Mary's "face was pasty white. Her eyes were glassy. She was very drunk." Having finished a fifth of rum with Jan and thus, at least in Mary's case, having gone beyond their capacity for alcohol, Mary and Bigger have exhausted their resources for forming a meaningful social connection—except for actual affectionate physical contact. Either as a final attempt to connect or simply because she is very drunk, Mary leans her head on Bigger's shoulder. When she asks Bigger if this contact bothers him and he replies, "I don't mind," Mary observes teasingly, "You know, for three hours you

⁵¹ Wright, *Native Son*, 78.

haven't said *yes* or *no*." Though they will soon have even greater and more fateful physical contact, the fundamental failure of conviviality across racial lines is finally and firmly established by Mary's tease and Bigger's reaction, unintended by and inscrutable to Mary: "She doubled up with laughter. He tightened with hate."⁵²

Bigger's Violent Hard-Boiled Legacy

In the aftermath of his accidental murder of Mary Dalton, Bigger confronts the far wider realm of whites who have no interest in trying to connect with black men as their fellows. Despite the couple's relative benevolence, Jan and Mary were naïve to think they could simply include Bigger in an evening's activities and thereby circumvent the layers of oppression that veil Bigger's sight of the white world. Indeed, their attempt at conviviality with Bigger casts a further pall over his public image and other whites' interpretations of the circumstances surrounding Mary's death. In Jan's interview during the inquest, for instance, the coroner repeatedly refers to Bigger as "a drunken Negro" and pursues the theory that Jan purposefully got both Mary and Bigger drunk, then used Mary as sexual "bait" to lure Bigger into the Communist Party.⁵³ Even at this point, long after Bigger has been captured and shortly after he has signed a confession, the coroner is not ready to accept that Bigger could have committed murder without the permission of a white man. Because he sees Bigger as a little more than an animal, he is more than willing to entertain the possibility that, having been offered sex with a white woman, Bigger got drunkenly carried away and murdered her in some unspeakably brutal fashion.

⁵² Wright, *Native Son*, 80-81.

⁵³ Wright, *Native Son*, 319.

The failure of white men like the coroner to see Bigger as fully human ultimately traps Bigger in an increasingly narrowing existence, leading only to a fast-approaching death. However, Bigger's temporary ability to avoid suspicion, throwing it instead onto Jan, suggests in its details the positive aspects of double consciousness that Chester Himes, Walter Mosley, and other authors of African American detective fiction have emphasized to develop some of the most effective and engaging detective characters in the hard-boiled genre. For instance, because he knows how white men with physical authority over others (like police officers) tend to see a young black man like himself, Bigger hates but ultimately does not fear Britten, the one actual hard-boiled private detective in *Native Son*. Bigger is frightened during moments of Britten's first interrogation, particularly when Britten accuses him of being a Communist. But Bigger quickly realizes that the private detective does not have a particularly keen eye, wearing as he does the blinders of racism. "Britten was his enemy," Bigger determines toward the end of the detective's questioning. "He knew that the hard light in Britten's eyes held him guilty because he was black."⁵⁴

Overhearing Britten and Mr. Dalton speak after the interrogation, Bigger gets a fuller sense of just how myopic this racist private eye is. "To me, a nigger's a nigger.... You got to be rough with 'em, Dalton. See how I got that dope out of 'im? He wouldn't've told you that."⁵⁵ Here Wright begins a critique of the white hard-boiled character type that will carry through to later African American writers of the genre. Though Britten slams Bigger's head against a wall while questioning him, he gets

⁵⁴ Wright, *Native Son*, 162.

⁵⁵ Wright, *Native Son*, 163.

nothing out of Bigger that Bigger did not prepare to tell the authorities beforehand, including several major lies. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger perpetuate and even amplify the roughness of the white hard-boiled detectives that precede them. In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, on the other hand, Easy Rawlins understands his police interrogators as the kind who replace probing intelligence with brute violence, in what he derisively calls the game of “cops and nigger.”⁵⁶ Indeed, Easy understands his captors well enough to know how to challenge them both verbally and physically without risking serious retribution.

Early figures in detective fiction with almost superhuman powers of deduction, like Poe’s Auguste Dupin and Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, emerged in response to the real-world police forces that many nineteenth century Americans and Europeans feared were not up to their task in increasingly complex cities. While Hammett and Chandler perpetuate the detective fiction convention of the singularly effective figure of justice, Bigger’s experience of Britten subverts it by turning Bigger’s black gaze on the hard-boiled detective. “He would know how to handle Britten next time,” Bigger determines after overhearing the detective debrief with Mr. Dalton. “Britten was familiar to him; he had met a thousand Brittens in his life.”⁵⁷ Britten is *Native Son*’s parody of the lone-wolf Marlovian detective, and through Bigger’s dismissive analysis of his character Wright suggests that Philip Marlowe will only appear to be one of a kind until one of those Florian’s patrons Marlowe sees as mere figures of an “alien” presence gets his own opportunity to look back at the private eye.

⁵⁶ Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, 115.

⁵⁷ Wright, *Native Son*, 164.

Wright likewise parodies the conventional scene in detective fiction wherein the singularly brilliant (or streetwise) detective unveils the solution to the mystery. In *Native Son*, Bigger's prosecutor, Buckley, brings out sixty witnesses to testify against Bigger, even though Bigger has already signed a confession and entered a plea of guilty.⁵⁸ The only purpose of this parade of witnesses is to remind the public of the minutest details of Bigger's crimes and thereby overwhelm the entreaty of Bigger's attorney to understand his crimes as the commission of a fellow human being. Rather than the keen eye of Philip Marlowe, all State's Attorney Buckley has to offer in the service of justice is racist vitriol.

Of course, Wright's double-conscious contribution to hard-boiled detective fiction is more substantial than a revelation of white racist myopia. An admirer of Wright, Chester Himes delivered many times over in the Harlem detective series the exciting detective novel readers had initially expected to find in *Native Son*, without sacrificing Wright's critique of American race relations. More explicitly, Mosley's Easy Rawlins is articulate regarding the lessons Bigger learned through his ordeal but upon which he did not live to act. In other words, Easy narrates and acts upon his double-conscious understanding of white urban America without Bigger's fear. When the overwhelmingly white (in skin, dress, and name) DeWitt Albright first looks at Easy after entering the bar where Easy is the lone patron, "I felt a thrill of fear, but that went away quickly because I was used to white people by 1948. I had spent five years with white men, and women, from Africa to Italy, through Paris, and into the Fatherland itself. I ate with them and

⁵⁸ Wright, *Native Son*, 375.

slept with them, and I killed enough blue-eyed young men to know that they were just as afraid to die as I was.”⁵⁹

Later, upon inviting Easy into his office to explain the investigation he would like Easy to undertake, Albright delights in the bottle of Wild Turkey he is able, as his own boss, to keep in plain sight atop his desk. They share a good portion of the whiskey with true conviviality, even though Easy has noticed there is something menacing about Albright. “He was a fine host,” Easy narrates. “His liquor was good and he was pleasant enough.” Even though Easy is not a violent private detective, his character’s lack of fear among people like DeWitt Albright is predicated on the fact that he has killed white men in war, just as Bigger only feels fully in control of his life after he has killed Mary. Easy doesn’t flinch when Albright warns, before downing a shot, “some of us can kill with no more trouble than drinking a glass of bourbon.” Shortly before Albright takes this drink, Easy thinks, “His pale blue eyes reminded me of the wide-eyed corpses of German soldiers that I once saw stacked up on a road in Berlin.”⁶⁰

If Richard Wright laid bare the racial boundaries of intoxicated conviviality, his two most famous successors in the African-American hard-boiled detective subgenre reveal an equally troubling truth in the efficacy of their black male detectives’ violence. The lessons Bigger learns before dying, which finally allow Bigger to think of “Mister” Erlone as “Jan,” a man just like himself, are central to the figure of the hard-boiled black male detective. Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones are only effective because they are known to kill. Easy Rawlins is only comfortable around white men because he

⁵⁹ Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, 45.

⁶⁰ Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, 66, 67.

killed many as a soldier in World War II. As Bigger says, “Maybe it ain’t fair to kill, and I reckon I really didn’t want to kill. But when I think of why all the killing was, I begin to feel what I wanted, what I am...”⁶¹ If a black man in hard-boiled fiction is to be a detective, it seems that he must kill, whether it’s fair and whether he wants to or not.

⁶¹ Wright, *Native Son*, 430, 428-29.

Chapter Five

“The Hole You’re In”: Gender, Noir, and the Modern Alcoholism Film from *The Lost*

Weekend to Leaving Las Vegas

In the 1940s and ‘50s, the heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine detective thrived in American crime fiction and, for the first time, played a substantial role in American film. The emergence of Alcoholics Anonymous not only as a therapeutic but also as a cultural force in post-World War II America signaled renewed, widespread anxiety about men’s drinking. However, the newly authoritative disease model of alcoholism located the cause of drinking-related woes not in alcohol itself, but in those who suffered from the vaguely-defined disease of alcoholism. Therefore, heavy drinkers like the masculine hard-boiled detective continued an unproblematic cultural existence alongside a burgeoning cast of men threatened by alcoholism—the *femme fatale* within.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the film noir subgenre of alcoholism films helped maintain the semiotics of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity in post-World War II American culture. By portraying alcoholism as a disease of masculinity to be remedied through vigilant feminine nurturance, alcoholism films propagated the hard-boiled dichotomy of feminine responsibility for besieged masculinity. In my analysis of the neo-noir alcoholism film *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), I look ahead to the decline of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity in the late twentieth century, a decline that I detail in chapter 6. By portraying alcoholic writer Ben Sanderson as the victim of a literal, terminal disease, *Leaving Las Vegas* highlights the futility of his prostitute

companion Sera's suffering on his behalf without sparing any details of the pain she suffers in her nurturer's role.

In explaining this dissertation to those unfamiliar with detective fiction subgenres, I have found that the easiest shorthand for describing the difference between classical and hard-boiled detective fiction is simply to say that Sherlock Holmes represents the former and Humphrey Bogart the latter. Indeed, Bogart portrayed heavy-drinking hard-boiled detectives in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *The Big Sleep* (1946), two iconic films noir adapted from canonical hard-boiled novels by Hammett and Chandler, respectively. But though these films reinforce generic images of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity, other canonical films noir in which Bogart starred complicate the relationship between masculinity and heavy drinking that the hard-boiled white male established in fiction published before World War II. For instance, war films like *Casablanca* (1942) and *To Have and Have Not* (1944) show Bogart's character rejecting heavy-drinking solipsism in favor of sober personal sacrifice for the common good. As Robert Sklar puts it, "Humphrey Bogart...was memorably cast several times as a man who found in commitment to war the answer to his inner dilemmas."¹

More than these films released during the war, *Key Largo* (1948) makes explicit the connection between American virtue in World War II and the rejection of pre-war American corruption under Prohibition. Bogart's character, Major Frank McCloud, finds that the American purpose in the war remains unfulfilled when he travels to Key Largo to

¹ Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage, 1994), 255.

find the hotel owned by the family of his wartime companion, who died heroically, occupied by Johnny Rocco, a Capone-like mobster, and his entourage. When Rocco asks McCloud, by then Rocco's prisoner, why he fought in the war, McCloud replies, "I believed some words.... They went like this: 'But we are not making all this sacrifice of human effort and human lives to return to the kind of a world we had after the last World War. We're fighting to cleanse the world of ancient evils, ancient ills,'" quoting Franklin Roosevelt's 1942 State of the Union Address. James Temple, the father of McCloud's fallen comrade George, points to Rocco and adds, "We rid ourselves of your kind once and for all. You ain't coming back!"²

Later, Rocco's underling Curly makes the ideal conditions of the criminal underworld's comeback explicit. Trying to calm his boss's nerves as a hurricane rattles the Temples' Largo Hotel, Curly assures Rocco, "I bet you two, three years, we get Prohibition back. This time we make it stick. I bet you two, three years Prohibition comes back. Absolutely, yeah." Ziggy, another criminal boss who visits the hotel to pick up a package of counterfeit money from Rocco, repeats the assertion but estimates that Prohibition will come back "inside of two years." If one were to watch *Key Largo* without prior historical knowledge of World War II, one would reasonably assume the global war was fought over a single amendment to the United States Constitution.

Aside from the police officer Rocco shoots to kill inside the Largo Hotel, the clearest victim of Rocco's corrupted public order is Gaye Dawn, the alcoholic woman who had been Rocco's moll before he was exiled from the United States eight years

² *Key Largo*, directed by John Huston (1948; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2005), DVD.

earlier. When she first appears on screen, Gaye is sitting at the hotel bar, drunk and listing. Later, after being forcefully confined to her room, she is shaky, tense, and desperate to drink again. “One thing I can’t stand, it’s a dame who’s drunk,” Rocco chastises after she sneaks half a drink. “What I mean, they turn my stomach. No good to themselves or anybody else.” In between heavy, nervous breaths, Gaye counters, “You gave me my first drink, Johnny.”

A once-beautiful nightclub singer who can no longer sing and must be drunk to function otherwise, Gaye Dawn is the postwar coda to Chandler’s *femmes fatales*, brought to ruin through the corrupting excesses of Prohibition. Indeed, while in one sense the American crime films of the 1940s and ‘50s now known as films noir simply brought hard-boiled crime fiction belatedly to the screen, these hard-boiled films complicate Hammett and Chandler’s prewar conventions of heavy-drinking masculinity and feminine alcoholic greed by the simple virtue of arriving on screen as American drinking mores underwent their most significant transformation since the enactment of Prohibition. In fact, as a woman alcoholic, Gaye Dawn is a somewhat rare figure in film noir, especially in those films (like *Key Largo*) that veer closer to didacticism than nihilism. Like Johnny Rocco, films about alcoholism did not know what to do with a dame who’s drunk, largely because such films represented a broad cultural effort to marshal the sympathies of the public toward (middle-class white) alcoholic men.

Director Billy Wilder’s follow-up to *Double Indemnity* (1944), arguably the most iconic of all films noir, *The Lost Weekend* (1945) is itself the most iconic of all didactic midcentury films about alcoholism. Prohibition comes up only briefly in the film, but in the monologue of a menacingly feminine male nurse in the alcoholic ward of a New York

hospital, the Prohibition era bears a lot of weight in the film's diagnosis of alcoholism. In showing the failed alcoholic writer who is the film's protagonist, Don Birnam, what he has to look forward to as an "alky," the male nurse Bim points out two other respectable, educated white male alcoholics in the hospital like Don: "Him, for instance. Shows up every month just like the gas bill. And the one there with the glasses. Another repeater: this is his forty-fifth trip. Big executive in the advertising business. Lovely fellow; been coming here since 1927. Good old Prohibition days. Say, you should have seen the joint then. This is nothing! Back then, we really had a turnover. Standing room only! Prohibition: that's what started most of these guys off."³

Indeed, the midcentury alcoholism movement, powered above all by the successes and growth of the mutual help group Alcoholics Anonymous, bore a relationship to Prohibition effectively embodied by 36-year-old Don Birnam. As John Crowley explains, "A.A. itself was another creation of the Lost Generation of middle-class Americans who came of age during the early 1920s and who made excessive drinking a hallmark of their youthful rebellion. When this cohort reached middle age at mid-century, it was faced with the resultant drinking problems."⁴ In turn, not only did the "subject of recovery from alcoholism...become a flourishing genre,"⁵ but also the new medical ideas about alcoholism and rhetoric of Alcoholics Anonymous began to inflect American literary and popular culture narratives of all genres, including hard-boiled fiction and film noir. Even Raymond Chandler, in his penultimate novel *The Long Goodbye* (1953), grappled

³ *The Lost Weekend*, directed by Billy Wilder (1945; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2000), DVD.

⁴ John W. Crowley, *The White Logic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 156.

⁵ Crowley, *White Logic*, 155.

thoughtfully with the new ideas about heavy drinking. Marlowe ruminates at length about, for instance, the difference between “a man who drinks too much on occasion” and “a real alcoholic.”⁶ (To be clear, Marlowe himself remains the former.)

According to Hammett’s *Red Harvest*, Prohibition corrupted everything in the American public sphere, including alcohol and the places where men gather to drink it. In *The Big Sleep* and *Farewell, My Lovely*, Chandler hardened the hard-boiled distinctions between convivial, masculine warrior virtue and alcoholic feminine corruption. No wonder, then, that in didactic films noir about alcoholism, alcohol itself is the corrupting *femme fatale* (or, as the presence of Bim in *The Lost Weekend* suggests, possibly an even more nefarious *homme fatale* in feminine garb). Unlike the many films noir with the naturalistic or nihilistic endings commonly associated with the genre, didactic alcoholism films like *The Lost Weekend* end with their heroes finally rejecting their bottled *femmes fatales* for dutiful, long-suffering girlfriends and wives. Like the neo-noirs of the 1970s and beyond, the late alcoholism film *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995) rejects the strain of post-World War II optimism and didacticism in classic-era films noir like *Key Largo* (1948) and *The Lost Weekend* (1945). In rejecting the possibility of redemption for its middle-class white male alcoholic protagonist, *Leaving Las Vegas* also rejects the gender dynamics of alcoholism films as no less misogynist than, and even of a kind with, heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity’s construction of the *femme fatale*. While that construction defined feminine ambition as selfish and excessive, *Leaving Las Vegas* shows that the subservient nurturer’s role to which alcoholism films assign women denies their characters’ fundamental selfhood.

⁶ Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 181.

Chronologically, Norman Denzin ends his survey of alcoholism films with a lament about the state of the genre at the end of the 1980s:

Unlike his counterpart in the 1940s and 1950s, the 1980s alcoholic is now free to be more than an alcoholic. Who he is, though, if the film critics are to be believed, is still informed by A. A. and the classic story of his experiences as given in *The Lost Weekend*. Unwilling to let go of this filmic representation of the drunkard, critics persist in comparing his contemporary versions to Wilder's 1945 story. This historical gesture serves to keep today's alcoholic trapped in a prepostmodern world where social problems films with didactic messages are still valued. This movie keeps the focus on the alcoholic's situation, and fails to take notice of the multiple changes he (and American society) have undergone since 1945.... Hollywood and television producers are looking backward as they grope their way forward into the 1990s. Could it be that the decade of the 1980s exhausted all of the possible ways of representing the alcoholic hero and his experiences?⁷

Alcoholism films, those "in which the inebriety, alcoholism, and excessive drinking of one or more of the major characters is presented as a problem which the character, his or her friends, family, and employers, and other members of society self-consciously struggle to resolve,"⁸ only barely outlived the 1980s. There are many potentially valid explanations for why alcoholism rarely appears as a central conflict in mainstream American film after the mid-1990s, effectively spelling the death of a significant noir

⁷ Norman K. Denzin, *Hollywood Shot by Shot: Alcoholism in American Cinema* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991), 233.

⁸ Denzin, *Hollywood Shot by Shot*, 3.

subgenre. A particularly compelling argument for the genre's demise comes from *Leaving Las Vegas*, one of three alcoholism films released in 1995, the only one to achieve mainstream middlebrow respectability and praise and quite possibly the last film of its kind.⁹ By portraying the disease model of alcoholism at its literal extreme and moving "rock bottom" down to its logical extreme (death), *Leaving Las Vegas* makes the modern alcoholism paradigm grotesque, revealing the lonely and painful depths to which the alcoholic's female counterpart must herself sink in order to play her complementary nurturer's role. In short, *Leaving Las Vegas* lets the modern alcoholic die and, along with him, kills off a filmic paradigm of alcoholism too narrow in its understanding of gender roles to survive its post-World War II origins any longer.¹⁰ In thus portraying alcoholism as a terminal disease, *Leaving Las Vegas* at once acknowledges the place of *The Lost Weekend* in the noir canon while also further marginalizing the film, dismissing the inherent optimism of didactic alcoholism films in favor of the darker naturalism of *Double Indemnity*.

In order to explain how *Leaving Las Vegas* takes the conventions of alcoholism films to their logical extremes, we must first look back to that noir subgenre's keystone, *The Lost Weekend*. While Denzin argues that comparisons between contemporary alcoholism films and the key canonical text of the genre hold the alcoholism film genre back, I argue that the conventions of the genre itself, specifically its A. A.-informed

⁹ The other two alcoholism films from this year were the A. A. drama *Drunks* and the *Saturday Night Live* feature *Stuart Saves His Family*. *Leaving Las Vegas* was nominated for four Academy Awards; Nicolas Cage won the best actor award for his portrayal of Ben Sanderson.

¹⁰ Rick Altman explains how shifts in cultural institutions "can eventually transform genres massively or even wipe them out entirely." Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 177.

paradigm of addiction and attendant gender-role paradigm, kept alcoholism films from pursuing original insights into the nature of self-destructive drinking. Rather than try to provide a new explanation for alcoholism, *Leaving Las Vegas* explodes its genre by revealing the limits of the disease model and the imbalance in gender roles required for that model's maintenance. Indeed, a look back at *Lost Weekend* and its overtly gendered follow-up, *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* (1947), reveals that gender was, from the beginning, the Achilles heel of the A. A.-influenced, pop-cultural alcoholism paradigm in postwar America.

“If a canonical film can be said to exist in the ‘alcoholism’ genre,” explains Denzin, “it is *The Lost Weekend*. . . . A number of firsts are associated with *The Lost Weekend*. . . . It is the first to use and present the medical model of alcoholism. It is the first film to feel A. A.’s presence.”¹¹ Director Billy Wilder consulted the literature of Alcoholics Anonymous while filming *The Lost Weekend*, and the organization’s “presence” is certainly conspicuous in the film’s dialogue.¹² Based on Charles Jackson’s bestselling novel of the same name, the film follows failed novelist Don Birnam on a four-day binge in New York City while his brother Wick, on whom he is financially dependent, is out of town. Don’s girlfriend, Helen St. James, tries to find and help Don during his binge, reasonably convinced that Don is unable or unwilling to take care of himself when drinking heavily. She finally catches up with Don by the time he is

¹¹ Denzin, *Hollywood Shot by Shot*, 49.

¹² Ibid. See also Claire Clark, “Bill W. Goes to Hollywood: The Rise and Fall of Recovering Addiction Experts,” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 32, no. 2 (2011): 93-99, doi: 10.1007/s10912-011-9136-6.

suffering from delirium tremens and manages to persuade him to write a novel about his struggles with alcohol rather than kill himself.

Winning four Academy Awards in 1945, including the best picture award, *The Lost Weekend* established the alcoholism genre with mainstream middlebrow respectability, added a phrase to the American popular culture lexicon (“lost weekend”), and, “incorporating the fundamental ideas of the disease concept, . . . played a major role in transforming public attitudes toward alcoholism.”¹³ Helen is the film’s primary mouthpiece for the disease model, particularly when she defends Don to Wick, who is ready to abandon his alcoholic brother: “He’s a sick person. It’s as though there were something wrong with his heart or his lungs. You wouldn’t walk out on him if he had an attack; he *needs* our help!”¹⁴ Curiously, however, *Lost Weekend* is unwilling fully to subscribe to the disease model, inasmuch as there is a cultural explanation given for Don’s drinking. Stepping out of line with A. A.’s notion of the alcoholic’s physical “allergy,”¹⁵ Don explains that he is a heavy drinker because of “what I am. Or, rather, what I’m not. What I wanted to become and didn’t. . . . A writer.” Likewise, he finds the cure for his alcoholism not in a doctor’s office or group therapy but in his final determination (spurred by Helen) that he has it in him to write a great, important novel.

Indeed, Robin Room shows that, in post-World War II alcoholism films, “there was considerable divergence in the presentation of alcoholism; in particular, the message

¹³ Lori Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks: Men, Women, and Alcohol in Post-World War II America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 87.

¹⁴ *The Lost Weekend*, directed by Billy Wilder (1945; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2000), DVD.

¹⁵ “The Doctor’s Opinion,” in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001): xxi-xxviii.

on alcoholism that they presented to American society often strayed quite far from the images which Alcoholics Anonymous or the National Council on Alcoholism would have preferred.”¹⁶ Alcoholics Anonymous itself has historically shown its own ambivalence about the images of alcoholism it prefers, even between the pages of the “Big Book.” After providing the prefatory authority of “The Doctor’s Opinion” and explaining the disease model of alcoholism, the Big Book confuses the idea of an alcoholic allergy by explaining why Step Four (the personal moral inventory) is necessary to recovery: “Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.”¹⁷

Scientific clarity, clean of cultural, “mysterious,” “psychodynamic,” or “situational” explanations,¹⁸ is not the central aim of Alcoholics Anonymous and the disease model, nor is it likely a concern for the many people who turn to them for help. Indeed, Ron Roizen has demonstrated that Alcoholics Anonymous flourished in spite of evidence contradicting the disease model.¹⁹ As Lori Rotskoff suggests, the disease model serves purposes beyond popularizing the notion that alcoholism is a medical condition: “Through [Don’s] character [in *The Lost Weekend*] we see that the medicalization of alcoholism entailed an effort to eliminate the moral stigma of excessive drinking as a low-class condition.”²⁰ In this regard, it is not important that cultural or psychological

¹⁶ Robin Room, “Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films, 1945-1962: The Party Ends for the ‘Wet Generations,’” accessed January 11, 2013, <http://www.robinroom.net/partyend.htm>

¹⁷ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 64.

¹⁸ Room, “Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films.”

¹⁹ Ron Roizen, “How Does the Nation’s ‘Alcohol Problem’ Change from Era to Era? Stalking the Social Logic of Problem-Definition Transformations Since Repeal,” in *Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States, 1800-2000*, ed. Sarah W. Tracy and Caroline Jean Acker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004): 65-68.

²⁰ Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks*, 90.

motivations for Don's alcoholism completely be cast aside in order for the disease model to play the main ideological character in *The Lost Weekend*. Rather, the disease model plays its part by explaining why a talented, sophisticated, upper-middle-class man like Don Birnam should succumb to the base temptation of heavy drinking: he is the victim of an affliction imposed upon him by forces (possibly biological) beyond his control, not simply a man with weak willpower or a lack of scruples.

Those who would benefit from the empathy imparted by the disease model *The Lost Weekend* helped to popularize, however, represent a very narrow demographic. It has been widely noted that E. M. Jellinek, "a physiologist at the Yale Center [for Alcohol Studies] who is generally considered the father of the disease model...did not use any data on women alcoholics when he formulated his model, and his interpretation was clearly gendered, assuming the alcoholic to be a man, as evidenced by his focus on occupational adjustment and the 'ability to be a good provider.'"²¹ Michelle McClellan elaborates on the result of Jellinek's disregard of women and other gendered assumptions in mid-twentieth century medicine and psychiatry: "alcoholic women were excluded, both rhetorically and practically, from the disease model of alcoholism, and social and pathological drinking by women were interpreted as symptoms of the same social problem—the allegedly increasing 'masculinity' of American women."²² While the disease model, or "modern alcoholism paradigm," held negative gender implications

²¹ Michelle McClellan, "Lady Tiplers': Gendering the Modern Alcoholism Paradigm, 1933-1960," in *Altering American Consciousness*, 269-70. See also Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks*, 67-68. For a more detailed description of the process by which women were excluded from Jellinek's study, see Clark, "Bill W. Goes to Hollywood," 91.

²² McClellan, "Lady Tiplers," 290.

about role reversal for men as well as women, the model served to create popular empathy for alcoholic men but defined alcoholic women as a threat.²³

One way that threat was addressed was by simply erasing it, as Jellinek did in his research. Outside the realm of medicine, this erasure was accomplished by assigning women a complementary role to alcoholic men, one that did not allow for the possibility of a female alcoholic. Rotskoff explains that, while the disease model of alcoholism “absolved the drinker of much of the social harm he inflicted on others and encouraged society to offer him its ever-expanding therapeutic resources,” therapeutic and popular rhetoric defined a role for the woman in an alcoholic man’s life, too. Unlike the public, political object of sympathy the alcoholic’s wife had been prior to Prohibition, “the postwar alcoholic’s wife was enlisted in a private effort to enhance her spouse’s recovery.”²⁴ Don and Helen are not yet married as characters in *The Lost Weekend*, but as a romantic couple, they fulfill the roles Rotskoff implies above. Even though Helen has a full-time job at *Time* magazine, which keeps her at the office “all Saturday, all Sunday,” she tries to contact Don throughout his long lost weekend, finally sleeping in front of his apartment door waiting for him to come home. It is only through Helen’s coddling, against Don’s wishes, that he lives through the weekend and ends the film hopeful for the future. Even though Helen is more like a mother than a lover to Don,²⁵ theirs is ultimately a happy love story—one that would have been almost completely without conflict if Helen had no job and could have taken care of Don all weekend, instead of merely swooping in to save him at the end.

²³ McClellan, “Lady Tiplers,” 269, 274.

²⁴ Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks*, 192-93.

²⁵ Denzin, *Hollywood Shot by Shot*, 257-58.

A great deal of *Lost Weekend*'s success as a popular representation of alcoholism no doubt derives from its representation of Don and Helen's unequal relationship as natural for both man and woman. Indeed, Room notes that the convention "of the faithful woman who hangs on through the roller-coaster of her man's drinking" is identifiable in most alcoholism films released in the postwar era,²⁶ following *The Lost Weekend*'s success. Don must eventually fulfill a masculine role as a self-sufficient provider, but the burden is on Helen, not on him, to make sure he survives his alcoholic dependency first. The film keeps this dynamic from being overtly that of a mother and a child by having Don express his hard-boiled desire to suffer alone and even kill himself before imposing his affliction on Helen. On the other hand, Helen explains that she views alcohol as her "rival" for Don's attention. Hence, while Don is in many ways an emasculated and dependent figure, he compensates for his emasculation with his will to suffer alone if only Helen would let him. Meanwhile, Helen is nurturing but maintains an aura of sexuality by finding a sexual rival in alcohol,²⁷ Don's other (and fatal) woman.

While *The Lost Weekend* maintains the idea that the modern alcoholism paradigm can lead to equal happiness and fulfillment for both genders, *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman* gives the lie to the gender inequality inherent to the disease model. Directed by Stuart Heisler, whose film noir credits also include the Hammett adaptation *The Glass Key* (1942), *Smash-Up* tells the story of Angie Evans, a popular nightclub singer who

²⁶ Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films."

²⁷ The dynamic between Don and Helen is another element of the story wherein the influence of A. A. is strongly felt. Their relationship follows many of the descriptions and suggestions in the Big Book chapters "To Wives" and "The Family Afterward," including the apology that, while "father" was drinking, "mother, through no fault of her own, became accustomed to wearing the family trousers." *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 131.

happily gives up her career to marry Ken Conway, himself a struggling musician. Angie gives birth to a baby girl at the same moment that Ken's career suddenly takes off. Finding herself in the lap of luxury, without any household responsibilities but with many social obligations in Ken's professional circle, Angie starts drinking to deal with both her boredom and her social anxiety. (As a singer, Angie needed a double shot of liquor before she could go on stage.) Ken does not understand his wife's apparent weakness, finally divorcing her and taking custody of their daughter. Angie, who never drinks when she needs to take care of her child, steals the child away from the nanny and runs away to her country house. There, while thinking sadly on Ken, she drops a cigarette, burning down the house but narrowly escaping alive with her daughter. Strangely, given the climactic importance of this scene, Angie is not drunk.²⁸ In the film's final hospital scenes, Angie and Ken, who now accepts some responsibility for his wife's behavior, are reunited. Without any explanation other than "I needed to hit rock bottom before I could change," Angie's drinking problem is apparently solved by the film's final scene.²⁹

"Promoted as the *Lost Weekend* with a woman,"³⁰ *Smash-Up* did not replicate *Lost Weekend*'s critical or popular success. Indeed, Denzin explains that "all critics compared the film to *Lost Weekend*, usually unfavorably."³¹ *Newsweek* called the film "a psychological phony,"³² and while this assessment comes close to describing the film's

²⁸ Denzin describes the film's climax thusly: "Drinking heavily, she passes out, sets the house on fire, and nearly kills the two of them" (*Hollywood Shot by Shot*, 75), although in the film Angie is clearly lost in melancholic reverie over her failed marriage, conscious and not at all drunk, when she drops her cigarette in her daughter's bedroom.

²⁹ *Smash-Up: The Story of a Woman*, directed by Stuart Heisler (1947; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios), Netflix Video.

³⁰ Clark, "Bill W. Goes to Hollywood," 96.

³¹ Denzin, *Hollywood Shot by Shot*, 79.

³² *Ibid.*

shortcomings, the script is actually more confused about how to handle Angie's alcoholism as a mental or physical health issue than it is outright disingenuous.³³ In the midst of an increasingly "Yellow Wallpaper"-like storyline, the character of Dr. Lorenz offers (in an authoritatively thick European accent) a contradictory assessment of Angie to Ken that encapsulates the film's difficulty in applying the modern alcoholism paradigm to itself:

With all the best intentions in the world, men like you make their wives idle, useless. You give them servants to clean their houses, nurses to take care of their children, and then you say to them, "Now you have everything you want. Sit there and enjoy it".... In doing so, you have taken all responsibility away from her. Left her life with no values. In despair, feeling she has lost you to your career in exchange for nothing she desired, your wife turned to this [picks up a martini glass].... Your wife is the victim of a disease, and there's only one cure. That is, to give up liquor entirely. They are like diabetics, who are to reject sugar and take the insulin. Alcoholics must give up alcohol. Live without it.

With a story originally co-written by Dorothy Parker but heavily edited by Marty Mann, early female A. A. member and founder of the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism,³⁴ *Smash-Up* is a rhetorical battle about the role of women in postwar American society fought over the terms by which women's alcoholism is to be understood. Angie's problem, as described by Dr. Lorenz, echoes Parker's fiction in its

³³ Room uses *Smash-Up* as an example of how "frequently...the rhetorics of motivation [to drink] are mixed together for the same character." Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films."

³⁴ Clark, "Bill W. Goes to Hollywood," 99.

understanding of women's alcoholism as the result of the subordination of women's interests to those of men.³⁵ Angie would be happy, by the logic of the film, simply if her husband would leave her some responsibility of her own—specifically, responsibility for the care of her daughter. This is hardly feminism, but rather than grant her character even that one responsibility, Dr. Lorenz and the film as a whole finally argue that Angie needs to have one of her few sources of recreation (self-destructive as it is) taken away from her. The A. A. solution carries the day, and Angie decides, apparently arbitrarily, that she has hit “rock bottom” and will start being happy as Ken's wife, without responsibilities and without alcohol. The triumph of the disease model means a life of continued subordination, boredom, and anxiety for Angie: “the film states that there is only one place for her and that is at home as mother and wife.”³⁶

The cure for women's alcoholism, by the logic of the disease model, is for women to accept the kind of role that Helen was happy to play for Don in *The Lost Weekend*. *Smash-Up* reveals, however, that from the birth of the alcoholism film subgenre, this gender dynamic was troubling and by no means natural. Fifty years after *The Lost Weekend* established the alcoholism film subgenre, director Mike Figgis would take the loneliness and violence of the disease model gender dynamic to its logical extreme in *Leaving Las Vegas*, thereby defining the end of the road for alcoholism films by virtue of the subgenre's antiquated gender politics, which in *Leaving Las Vegas* are visibly, dangerously inequitable.

³⁵ See, for example, Dorothy Parker, “Big Blonde,” in *The Portable Dorothy Parker*, ed. Marion Meade (New York: Penguin, 2006): 187-210.

³⁶ Denzin, *Hollywood Shot by Shot*, 82.

“Have you ever had the feeling that the world’s gone and left you behind?”

Leaving Las Vegas begins with Sting singing these words over a black screen, accompanied only by a bowed double bass. A piano soon joins the accompaniment, setting the tone for the proceeding soundtrack of mostly jazz standards. As the song continues (“...that you’re losing your mind?”), the first image of the film is Nicolas Cage, whistling happily as he fills a shopping cart indiscriminately with a cornucopia of alcohol. The soundtrack’s lyrics in this opening scene, and the music throughout the film, establish that the alcoholic protagonist is living a life out of step with the 1990s.

The narrative of the film does not linger on this point for long, however. The first fifteen minutes take place in Los Angeles, where, we learn, Ben Sanderson (Cage) is living his last two days as a screenwriter. This beginning sequence serves largely to establish that Ben is an alcoholic according to the modern alcoholism paradigm. When he accosts a friend (one he is about to lose) in a restaurant, his friend’s female companion asks another guest, regarding Ben, “What is the *matter* with him?” The guest responds, “He’s sick.” Indeed, the film offers little explanation for Ben’s ceaseless heavy drinking beyond this offhand diagnosis. Later in the night, after Ben has had much more to drink, he absentmindedly muses to a prostitute as she undresses him, “I don’t remember if I started drinking because my wife left me, or my wife left me ‘cause I started drinking...but fuck it, anyway.”³⁷

Unlike *The Lost Weekend* and possibly every other film of the alcoholism genre, *Leaving Las Vegas* subscribes wholeheartedly to the disease model in the sense that it

³⁷ *Leaving Las Vegas*, directed by Mike Figgis (1995; Santa Monica, CA: MGM/UA Home Video, 1996), VHS.

dismisses any explanations for Ben's destructive drinking other than "He's sick." The film flirts with another explanation—Ben's failed marriage and broken family—only to reject it. By embracing the disease model, the film also accepts the modern alcoholism paradigm's sexual implications. Just as *The Lost Weekend* pitted alcohol against Helen as her sexual rival, *Leaving Las Vegas* establishes in the opening Los Angeles sequence that Ben derives sexual pleasure from drinking. In one scene, he chugs a pint of whiskey while watching a woman strip, seizing up while drinking as if in the thrall of orgasm. In another, while in line at a bank waiting for the attractive female teller, he eyes the woman as he dictates into a handheld recorder:

Are you desirable? Are you irresistible? Maybe if you drank bourbon with me it would help. Maybe if you kissed me, and I could taste the sting in your mouth, it would help. If you drank bourbon with me naked, if you smelled of bourbon as you fucked me, it would help. It would increase my esteem for you. If you poured bourbon onto your naked body and said to me, "Drink this." If you spread your legs and you had bourbon dripping from your breasts and your pussy and said, "Drink here." Then I could fall in love with you, because then I would have a purpose: to clean you up, and that, *that* would prove that I'm worth something. I'd lick you clean so that you could go away and fuck someone else.

As the Big Book puts it, "Alcohol is so sexually stimulating to some men that they have over-indulged."³⁸

³⁸ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 134. Likewise, Room explains that, in the films he analyzes in "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films," "For women, drinking goes along with sex; for men, it replaces it."

Also distinguishing *Leaving Las Vegas* from its alcoholic predecessors is the lack of an easy solution for Ben's disease. Fifteen minutes into the film, Ben's life as he knows it is over: he has lost his family, he needs to drink constantly to perform basic tasks like signing his name, and he finally loses his job. Compared to the alcoholic protagonists in *The Lost Weekend* or *Smash-Up*, the place Ben finds himself is far below rock bottom, and he finds himself there at the beginning of *Leaving Las Vegas*. After Ben receives his severance check and states his intention to move to Las Vegas, the title of the film finally appears on screen. In the next scene, the viewer is introduced to Sera (Elisabeth Shue). At this point, all we know about Sera is that she is a prostitute and Yuri (Julian Sands) is her pimp.³⁹ However, her appearance almost immediately after the title of the film signifies her central role in *Leaving Las Vegas*. Once Ben burns most of his property and drives out to Las Vegas, his course is already determined and Sera effectively becomes the film's protagonist.

Ben's disease is more serious than Don's or Angie's because it is incurable. We learn, after Ben picks up Sera on the street and drives away with her for an evening of drinking and talking at his motel (The Whole Year Inn, a name he reads as "The Hole

³⁹ As the film progresses, we learn little more about Sera's background. Just as we get no explanation other than disease for Ben's drinking, we never learn how Sera came to be a prostitute in Las Vegas, except that she once tried to escape Yuri. This lack of explanation is a fitting female corollary to the extreme depiction of disease-model alcoholism in the film, for alongside alcoholism experts disseminating the disease model in the mid-twentieth century, "experts on family and sexual violence argued that many women had latent masochistic wishes to suffer abuse at the hands of men. In the 1940s, for example, the first psychoanalytic articles on rape began to appear, and these noted the victim's unconscious desire to be raped" (Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks*, 156). Taken at face value, just as Ben's characterization takes the idea of alcoholism as a disease at face value, such psychoanalytic justifications for female submissiveness logically lead to Sera, a prostitute whose occupation requires no explanation other than her womanhood.

You're In"), that Ben has moved to Las Vegas to drink himself to death. Later, after Yuri has been killed and Sera immediately begins to date Ben, she asks him over dinner, "Why are you killing yourself?" He responds, "Interesting choice of words. I don't remember. I just know that I want to." When she prods him further by asking, "Are you saying that your drinking is a way to kill yourself?" he replies, "Or killing myself is a way to drink." There is no reason for Ben's behavior; it is just what he is compelled to do. In fact, drinking is the *only* thing he wants to do, so he will do it for the rest of his life, even though his life is made significantly shorter by this choice. This is the logical extreme of the disease model: complete surrender to the compulsion to drink.⁴⁰ As it does for Don Birnam, the disease of alcoholism absolves Ben of responsibility for his actions, but his responsibility is diminished even further than Don's because he has already accepted that he is going to die very soon. His actions until then, therefore, can have no exceptionally negative effect on himself; they only potentially harm those around him.

Sera ends her first date with Ben (which, ironically, establishes the love triangle between Ben, alcohol, and Sera while Sting sings "My One and Only Love") by inviting him to spend the night on her couch, which turns by the next morning into an invitation to live out the last few weeks of his life in her apartment. Ben accepts both invitations, but only after stating plainly to Sera, "You can never, *ever*, ask me to stop drinking." Sera accepts Ben's terms, agreeing to play Helen to his extreme version of Don. There is some superficial equity in their relationship. As Ben puts it, "We both know I'm a drunk. And I know you're a hooker. I hope you understand that I am a person who is totally at ease

⁴⁰ The corollary to an A. A. member's surrender to a higher power. See Paul Antze, "Symbolic Action in Alcoholics Anonymous," in *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology*, ed. Mary Douglas (New York: Routledge, 2003): 149-81.

with this. Which is not to say that I'm indifferent, or I don't care—I do. It simply means I trust and accept your judgment.” However, the burden of Sera's occupation on Ben is minimal. The film has already established that he is not interested in Sera sexually—alcohol both fulfills his sexual desires and probably renders him all but impotent (“I'm not much good in the sack,” he tells Sera). He casts occasional jealous barbs at Sera about her tricks, but also brushes aside her sexual come-ons.

Like the pimp he has replaced, Ben benefits from his relationship with Sera substantially more than Sera benefits from her relationship with Ben. Of course, Ben differs from Yuri in that he is the object of Sera's care. Since Ben is a particularly extreme version of the alcoholic male, Sera's corollary role as a caregiver becomes something more profound than the motherly role Helen plays in *The Lost Weekend*. When Sera explains to Ben, after a blackout, that she prevented him from being thrown out of a casino by offering to take him home and never come back again, Ben replies, “That's amazing. What are you? Some sort of angel visiting me from one of my drunk fantasies? How can you be so good?” Ben recognizes that, as a prostitute, Sera has made a sacrifice on his behalf by voluntarily barring herself from a nearby casino. Sera replies to Ben's questions by claiming, “I'm just using you. I need you.” At best, though, this is simply another (her third, by this point in the film) admission of her loneliness. At worst, it is a defensive gesture against her recognition that she is sacrificing a great deal to a one-sided relationship that will leave her lonely again in a matter of weeks.

Sera turns out to be an alcoholic's fantasy indeed when, by the pool of a motel, she plays the role Ben imagined for the bank teller early in the film by pouring whiskey down her breasts for Ben to lick off (while Don Henley sings “I'm gonna love

you...come rain or come shine,” lyrics further suggesting Sera’s unconditional love). As they get ready to head inside, presumably to make love for the first time, Ben falls down after reaching for his drink and breaks a glass table. Sera sends Ben inside, where he is oblivious to the discussion she then has with the motel’s owner. The owner calls Sera and Ben “screw-ups” and tells Sera to plan to leave in the morning and never come back again. Ben is able to live a drunken fantasy by virtue of Sera’s willingness to take complete responsibility for (while he neglects her by virtue of) his behavior.

Sera finally does react to the heavy burden of her unconditional love for Ben and asks him to see a doctor. Ben responds by suggesting he move to a motel, to which Sera replies, “And do what? Rot away in a room? We’re not gonna talk about that. Fuck you. We’re not gonna talk about that. You’re staying here. You’re not going to any motel. I mean, it’s just one thing you can do for me. Just *one* thing. That’s all I ask. I’ve given you gallons of free will here; you can do this *one thing* for me.” Sera has never been more emotional, but Ben, nearly dead, says nothing in reply, his dumb facial expression unchanging. He does not immediately move to a motel but prompts Sera to kick him out of her apartment by bringing home a rival prostitute.

Rather than seek a more equitable relationship, Sera responds to Ben’s departure by selling her services to a group of young football players, who brutally beat and rape her. Afterwards, her pained walk and bruised face provoke her landlady to kick Sera out of her apartment. While Sera’s life as a prostitute becomes even lonelier, with people mocking and shunning her because of the sexual abuse she has obviously experienced, she searches for Ben. It is as if she has purposely made her life more violent and lonely in

order to convince herself that her relationship with Ben has value.⁴¹ A concerned cabbie, to whom Sera explains her appearance by saying, “I had an argument,” tells her, “If I was you I’d leave him. Pretty young thing like you? You can get any man you want! Don’t you know that?” He incorrectly assumes that Sera has a physically abusive boyfriend, but what he says applies to Sera’s relationship with Ben nonetheless. In this extreme version of a woman’s love for an alcoholic, Sera’s dedication to a relationship that does visible violence to her simply does not make sense except for the fact that Sera has been conditioned to accept her relationship with Ben as normal, even exceptionally good.

Ben finally calls Sera, and she meets him in his dark motel room. Sera continues to embrace her role as Ben’s caregiver even as Ben continues to reject the care he would need to live, were life possible at his level of dissipation. “You’re my love.... Do you want my help?” she asks. “No,” Ben responds. “I wanted to see you. You’re my angel.” Sera smiles and assures him, “I’m right here.” Ben shows genuine compassion for Sera when asking about her facial injuries, but shortly afterward embraces her rival, the bottle of liquor on the bedside table. Sera wins a brief victory against the bottle: slowly pulling it away from Ben’s mouth, then seeing that he is masturbating under his bed sheet, Sera says, “Let me do it.” Sera sits astride Ben and, in visible pain from her rape wounds, makes love to Ben. He asks Sera, “You know I love you, yeah?”

Ben dies shortly thereafter, leaving Sera to reflect on the relationship: “I liked his drama. And he needed me. I loved him. I really loved him.” Unlike Don Birnam, who

⁴¹ Film critic Roger Ebert says of Sera’s decision to meet the football players in their motel room, “this is so unwise that we read it as deliberately self-destructive.” Roger Ebert, “Great Movies: *Leaving Las Vegas*,” *rogerebert.com*, last modified April 25, 2004, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20040425/REVIEWS08/404250302/1023>.

needed Helen to nurture him toward adult masculinity, Ben actually did not need Sera. Both Don and Ben are prepared to end their lives for their love of alcohol. Don, whose alcoholism is presented in terms of the disease model but nonetheless has a solution in cultural terms, needs Helen to care for him until he understands what he needs to do to achieve adult masculinity. Ben, whose alcoholism is presented as a disease without a cultural origin and without a cure, does not need Sera, because he is prepared to die and will kill himself regardless of her role in his life. As a woman whose life depends on her willingness to serve the desires of men, Sera believes she needs Ben. In *Smash-Up*, Ken often calls Angie “Angel,” which is also the name of the couple’s daughter. As Ben’s “angel,” Sera (as in “seraphim”) is perhaps the last woman in American film to keep the faith in the subservient nurturer’s role that *Smash-Up* struggled to articulate.

Taking the disease model to its logical extreme by offering no explanation for Ben’s drinking problem and making death his “rock bottom” (or, as Ben’s imagination phrases it, “The Hole You’re In”), *Leaving Las Vegas* must likewise take the unequal gender roles that accompany the modern alcoholism paradigm to a lonely, violent extreme that is at times difficult to watch, leaves little room for elaboration, and very likely marks *Leaving Las Vegas* as the last major modern alcoholism film. While the naturalistic inevitability of Ben’s demise aligns the film with classic-era films noir in which men follow seductive women to their doom, like *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Criss Cross* (1948), and *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), it matters greatly that Ben’s *femme fatale* is metaphorical rather than human. In fact, by identifying a bottle and not a woman as Ben’s deadly seductress, *Leaving Las Vegas* rejects the hard-boiled gender dynamics of the

broader film noir genre as well as those specifically of the alcoholism film subgenre, portraying Sera as another victim of Ben's self-destruction rather than its cause.

By identifying the end of the alcoholism film genre's viability, I do not mean to suggest that Alcoholics Anonymous has outlived its usefulness or that the organization itself poses a threat to women today. In fact, Rotskoff points out that "AA's initial focus on men has been replaced by an overwhelming emphasis on women's addictions as well as female 'codependency'—the contemporary term for excessive emotional investment in another person's addictive behavior."⁴² Within the realm of popular representation, however, it is worthwhile to recognize that contemporary depictions of alcoholism are unlikely to reproduce the mid-twentieth century A. A.-oriented genre conventions established by *The Lost Weekend* any longer. As I have argued, Don Birnam's story and the conventions it established have been taken probably as far as they can go and no longer reflect mainstream values. Alongside films like *Leaving Las Vegas*, the last decade of the twentieth century saw the release of films like *When a Man Loves a Woman* (1994) and *28 Days* (2000), both about female alcoholics in recovery. Curt Hersey argues, in a 2005 article, that these films are part of a trend in representing women in recovery, albeit in a "univocal" and "unrealistic" manner that is selective along lines of race and class.⁴³ There does seem to have emerged a general addiction recovery genre, with popular reality shows like *Intervention* (A&E, 2005-present) and *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew* (VH1, 2008-2012) following in the footsteps of the aforementioned films. In terms of

⁴² Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks*, 237.

⁴³ Curt Hersey, "Script(ing) treatment: representations of recovery from addiction in Hollywood film," *Contemporary Drug Problems* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 467-93, <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.wm.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cmh&AN=18767550&site=chc-live>.

alcohol alone, however, the most widely-known and critically acclaimed twenty-first-century representation of alcoholism so far is likely the AMC television series *Mad Men* (2007-2015), in which alcohol abuse is just one part of an opulent, excessive masculine lifestyle for the show's main characters. "[A]lcoholism no longer carries the same metaphorical significance it had during the 1940s and 1950s,"⁴⁴ so it makes sense that it is presently represented in a show set back in the mid-twentieth century, in a fictional world where male characters assume the women around them will tolerate subordination, betrayal, and emotional indifference.

To conclude, I would like to quote another of Denzin's valuable insights regarding alcoholism films: "On inspection, the alcoholism alibi is a stand-in for another set of problems in American popular culture. As a gendered production, alcoholism represents the inability of males and females in this society to form satisfying, long-lasting interpersonal relationships. Alcoholism masks sexuality and desire and the patriarchal relationship between men and women in this culture."⁴⁵ As a metaphor for gender inequality and romantic failure, we can take heart in the demise of the "alcoholism alibi's" cultural applicability. This representational shift mirrors important shifts in the way real women and men are, and expect to be, treated. However, we should be mindful of the ways in which the unequal gender roles attendant to both the modern alcoholism paradigm and hard-boiled fiction and film still find places in our culture, especially when a popular, critically-acclaimed show like *Mad Men* looks back, at times

⁴⁴ Rotskoff, *Love on the Rocks*, 238.

⁴⁵ Denzin, *Hollywood Shot by Shot*, 238.

fondly,⁴⁶ to an imagined time when heavy drinking and the subordination of women were the prerogatives of upper-middle-class white men.

⁴⁶ Especially in the show's nostalgia-oriented marketing across print, visual, and social media.

Chapter Six

“I Didn’t Feel Like Doing My Carrie Nation Imitation”: *M*A*S*H*, Matthew Scudder, and the Turn to New Temperance Gothicism

Alongside the continued popularity of hard-boiled detective fiction and its emergent filmic counterpart in the post-World War II era, the alcoholism movement and the didactic films noir borne of its logic acknowledged and addressed the limits of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity. In addition to this depicted division between alcoholics and mere heavy drinkers, the era’s two most popular authors of hard-boiled detective fiction reveal a nascent class-based political division in the character of the hard-boiled detective. Appearing to divide the lowbrow and highbrow literary strains that Chandler had sought to combine, Mickey Spillane, on the one hand, “moved towards the creation of the super-macho punisher-hero, prototype for countless later protagonists who are ‘out for vengeance’. [Ross] Macdonald, on the other hand, favoured a version of the erring, guilt-ridden protagonist, investigating crimes that take place amongst genteel characters suffering from middle-class neuroses.”¹ Lee Horsley goes on to describe Spillane’s novels as “narrating the enfranchisement of the enlisted man: [Detective Mike] Hammer is...an American male eager to bring down retribution on his country’s enemies. This is the populist rhetoric of Cold War militarism and Hammer acts out McCarthyite paranoia.” Macdonald, meanwhile, “moved the genre toward liberalism and non-

¹ Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 88-89

violence.... He created a fictional world more familiar to the officer class and the ‘G.I. Bill intellectual’ than to the ordinary enlisted man.”²

Decades later, the CBS sitcom *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983) dramatized the midcentury paperback warrior-class divide Horsley describes. In an episode that aired January 26, 1981, six days into the Reagan era, the Boston Brahmin army surgeon Major Charles Winchester finds himself indebted to Corporal Max Klinger, the working-class Lebanese Ohioan who, in the show’s later seasons, becomes the primary enlisted character in *M*A*S*H*’s Korean War comedy. Klinger takes full advantage of Charles’s offer of care while he is convalescing from injuries sustained while saving the Major’s life. Charles is more than happy to repay his debt to Klinger with constant attention to his desires, up until the moment the Corporal asks the Major to read to him before bed. Charles’s annoyance morphs into disgust when Klinger reveals that he wants the Major to read to him from the Mickey Spillane novel *I, the Jury* (1947). Major Winchester gasps as he reads the author’s name. “I traded a dozen cigars for that!” Klinger responds proudly. “Just read the underlined parts.” At the end of the episode, Charles shows Klinger that he considers his debt paid in full by dumping the shredded remains of the Spillane paperback over Klinger’s still-bandaged head.³

Although Major Winchester regularly demonstrates that he is too elitist for his own good, both he and Klinger are cast as flawed but thoroughly decent characters. In fact, for much of the show’s run after the departure of the blindly militaristic character

² Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 90, 93.

³ Alan Alda, Jamie Farr, and David Ogden Stiers, “Operation Friendship,” *M*A*S*H*, season 9, episode 10, directed by Rena Down, aired on CBS January 26, 1981 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

Major Frank Burns, replaced by Charles in the show's sixth season (of eleven total), individual antagonists can be hard to identify on *M*A*S*H*. As in Hammett's *Red Harvest*, the villain of this often-serious sitcom is not a person but the pervasive atmosphere of death and corruption, created in the case of *M*A*S*H* by the Korean War. Viewed as a hard-boiled series for the (post-)Vietnam era, as I argue it should be, *M*A*S*H* begins with Spillane-like confidence in its not-at-all-Spillane-like antiwar politics. Army surgeon Captain Hawkeye Pierce is the show's wise-cracking, heavy-drinking, self-confident moral center, episodically challenged by the higher-ranked and less-skilled Major Burns. Major Margaret "Hot Lips" Houlihan, who is as attracted to money, power, and military discipline as Frank, catalyzes Frank into action against the good (and usually unmilitary) works of Captain Pierce.

The early seasons of *M*A*S*H*, with its protagonists' circumvention of authority, misogynist insults directed against *femme fatale* Major Houlihan, and carefree drinking matched by exceptional surgical skill and moral fortitude, constitute a Vietnam-era liberal (but nonetheless hard-boiled) response to the tough simplicity of Mike Hammer and the international anticommunism of fictional spies like James Bond. As the show continued to air into the late 1970s and early '80s, that self-confident dedication to "the war against the war" faded,⁴ as did the misogyny and untroubled depiction of alcohol use as a corrective against the sorrows of a violent world. The later seasons of the show are marked by explicitly feminist rhetoric, greater sympathy for the military (if not for war itself), and periodic anxiety about alcoholism and other addictions.

⁴ As Radar puts it in Gary Burghoff, "Hawk's Nightmare," *M*A*S*H*, season 5, episode 13, directed by Burt Metcalfe, aired on CBS December 21, 1976 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

The significance of the changes in this sitcom to the hard-boiled genre from which it borrows so many (gendered) conventions becomes clearer when considered in tandem with a more traditional example of the genre from the same era. While the moral ground shifts below Hawkeye Pierce over the course of *M*A*S*H*'s eleven seasons, Matthew Scudder's confidence in his righteousness is already shaken by the time Lawrence Sanders introduces Scudder as an unlicensed private detective in the 1976 novel *The Sins of the Fathers*. As he narrates in every novel in the series, Scudder left the New York City police force after accidentally killing an innocent child in pursuit of two murderous criminals. He also left his wife and two sons on Long Island, moving into an SRO hotel in Manhattan and drinking away the days in between (and during) cases. Over the first five novels in the series, Scudder's drinking increasingly impacts his health and detective work until, in the 1982 novel *Eight Million Ways to Die*, he joins Alcoholics Anonymous and sobers up.

In *M*A*S*H* and the Matthew Scudder novel series, the shift in depictions of the hard-boiled heroes' drinking reflected major shifts in the moral valence of both series, the hard-boiled genre overall, and American drinking mores and laws. All of these changes reflect the conservative turn in American culture beginning in the mid-1970s.⁵ In hard-boiled fiction, as particularly apparent in the Matthew Scudder novel series, murderers with complex motivations were largely replaced with serial killers motivated by pure (and simple) evil. Likewise, the modernist despair of the hard-boiled detective's heavy

⁵ For a general exploration of *M*A*S*H* as a reflection of changing American values over its eleven-season primetime run, see James H. Wittebols, *Watching M*A*S*H, Watching America: A Social History of the 1972-1983 Television Series* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1998).

drinking was, to a substantial degree, supplanted by the Gothic fatalism of nineteenth-century temperance fiction, reflecting the emergence of the late-twentieth century new temperance movement with its emphasis on the harm drinkers caused innocent bystanders through, for example, drunk driving and fetal alcohol syndrome. Heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity thus came full circle in the final decades of the twentieth century. From its origins in resistance to feminine incursions into the public sphere represented by Prohibition, heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity became once again the Gothic threat to the family that it had been in nineteenth-century temperance fiction and, indeed, as it had been by the pen of the detective genre's creator, Edgar Allan Poe.

***M*A*S*H* and Hard-Boiled Masculinity**

Critics and scholars generally do not identify *M*A*S*H* as a descendent or relative of the hard-boiled (or classical) detective genre. Based on the novel (1968) and film (1970) of the same title, the sitcom is widely noted for bridging genres, its use of comedy and drama in both medical and military situations being its most obvious generic innovations.⁶ Adding to its unique hybrid identity as a military/medical dramedy, David Scott Diffrient and Hye Seung Chung note the show's frequent use of epistolary devices, occasional imitations of TV news coverage, and juxtaposition of fictional drama with actual newsreel footage. Diffrient and Chung also laud the ways in which the show's producers innovated within its genre matrix, experimenting with perspective, real-time

⁶ James H. Wittebols, *Watching M*A*S*H, Watching America: A Social History of the 1972-1983 Television Series* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 1998), ix.

action, and dream sequences.⁷ However, neither these two nor other scholars of media and genre begin to suggest a relationship between *M*A*S*H* and detective fiction.

The failure to recognize the generic conventions of detective fiction in the characters, stories, and imagery of *M*A*S*H* is due, in part, to the understandable tendency of media scholars studying the show to compare *M*A*S*H* to other texts only within the television medium. Indeed, the limits of considering *M*A*S*H* in terms of televisual genres alone become apparent in light of the fact that the show's creators, most notably Alan Alda, the director, writer, producer, consultant, and actor behind Hawkeye Pierce, worried that the conventions of war sitcoms would neuter the show's possible social and political commentary. "I was afraid that the war would be treated by the writers and the production staff as just a background, a backdrop for lighthearted high jinks at the front," as Alda once put the sentiment he would restate many times about the origins of *M*A*S*H*.⁸ Had the Vietnam-era sitcom followed the conventions of earlier television war comedies like *McHale's Navy* (1962-66) or *Hogan's Heroes* (1965-71), Alda's fears for *M*A*S*H* would have been realized. In fact, while the novel and the film include gory operating room scenes, in both texts these scenes are indeed foregrounded by sex and high jinks. The kind of television adaptation Alda feared may have been more faithful to the source material than the sitcom that resulted from his involvement.

⁷ David Scott Diffrient and Hye Seung Chung, "TV Hybridity: Genre Mixing and Narrative Complexity in *M*A*S*H*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 29, no. 4 (2012): 285-302, doi: 10.1080/10509201003601142.

⁸ Alan Alda, "M*A*S*H: Television's Serious Sitcom," Special Features Disc 1, *M*A*S*H: The Martinis and Medicine Collection* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

As it turned out, however, the sitcom treats the moral and mortal gravity of its setting with more weight than the film, which is itself not quite so breezy as the novel. This change is manifested largely through the behavior and expressed moral code of its protagonists. Near the beginning of Richard Hooker's novel, Hawkeye introduces the basic scheme for his (and his tentmates') time in Korea, as he and fellow surgeon Duke Forrest share a drink before arriving at the MASH to meet their commanding officer, Colonel Blake:

“This Blake must have a problem or he wouldn't be sending for help.

Maybe we're that help.”

“Right,” the Duke said.

“So my idea,” Hawkeye said, “is that we work like hell when there's work and try to outclass the other talent.”

“Right,” the Duke said.

“This,” Hawkeye said, “will give us enough leverage to write our own tickets the rest of the way.”

“Y'all know something, Hawkeye?” the Duke said. “You're a good man.”⁹

This exchange provides an effective synopsis of the novel's tone and content. As Hooker describes in the foreword, regarding his own experience in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital during the Korean War, “a few” of the young doctors assigned to this stressful post “flipped their lids, but most of them just raised hell, in a variety of ways and degrees.

⁹ Richard Hooker, *MASH* (Pocket Books, 1969), 5-6.

This is a story of some of the ways and degrees.”¹⁰ In other words, *MASH* the novel is a collage of wartime high jinks set before a backdrop of grim wartime medicine, in all of which Hawkeye and his tentmates are equal partners.

The pilot episode of *M*A*S*H* begins to set a different tone for the sitcom with a brief Hawkeye monologue, roughly parallel to Hawkeye’s dialogue with Duke early in the novel. After 12 hours in the operating room, Hawkeye and his tentmate “Trapper” John McIntyre each settle onto their cots with a martini, made of moonshine from their own still. To no one in particular, Hawkeye tiredly muses: “You know, we got to do it someday. Throw away all the guns and invite all the jokers from the North and the South in here to a cocktail party. Last man standing on his feet at the end wins the war.”¹¹ Exhausted, Hawkeye pines for an end to the human carnage of war, against which he has worked all night, to be replaced with homosocial conviviality. No private eye since Philip Marlowe has put the thesis of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity so succinctly.

Importantly, Hawkeye states this convivial longing directly after he is first confronted by Major Margaret “Hot Lips” Houlihan, the power-thirsty, military rule-mongering head nurse who is Hawkeye’s primary antagonist over the first three seasons of *M*A*S*H*. The series famously developed a substantially feminist bent over its long primetime run, with the first real shift toward “a constructive relationship that’s based on mutual respect” between Hawkeye and Margaret, as Hawkeye himself puts it, coming

¹⁰ Hooker, foreword to *MASH*.

¹¹ Alan Alda and Wayne Rogers, “The Pilot Episode,” *M*A*S*H*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Gene Reynolds, aired on CBS September 17, 1972 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

late in the third season.¹² But Margaret remains a thorn in Hawkeye's side, a feminine interloper blustering her way through a masculine realm, through the early episodes of the show's fifth season, during which she ends her relationship with (and her nefarious feminine influence upon) the war-loving surgeon Major Frank Burns.

Hawkeye first establishes his Marlowe-like contempt for Margaret, as a woman attempting to exercise masculine power, when he responds to the scolding she and Frank give him for his unmilitary operating room witticisms in the pilot episode. Major Burns tells Captain Pierce, whom Burns outranks, that his "conduct in there was not only unbecoming of an officer, it was equally reprehensible as a medical man!" Hawkeye readily responds, "Frank, I happen to be an officer only because I foolishly opened an invitation from President Truman to come to this costume party. And as for my ability as a doctor, if you seriously question that, I'm afraid I'll just have to challenge you to a duel." When Frank reminds Hawkeye that "there are ladies present," Hawkeye says to Margaret, "Oh, sorry, baby."

"*Major* to you," she retorts.

"Right. Sorry, Major Baby," Hawkeye fires back.¹³ His meaning couldn't be clearer: Margaret can be an officer or a lady. To ask to be treated as both is asking too much.

¹² Alan Alda and Loretta Swit, "Aid Station," *M*A*S*H*, season 3, episode 19, directed by William Jurgensen, aired on CBS February 11, 1975 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

¹³ Alan Alda, Larry Linville and Loretta Swit, "The Pilot Episode," *M*A*S*H*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Gene Reynolds, aired on CBS September 17, 1972 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

Through the end of her relationship with Major Burns, transgressive feminine greed defines Margaret's antagonistic role in *M*A*S*H* to the same extent that it defined the roles of Philip Marlowe's *femmes fatales*. Like Helen Grayle in *Farewell, My Lovely*, Margaret usurps the power of the men attracted to her, rendering them as her puppets. A running joke, first deployed in the pilot episode, is Margaret's unique ability to go over the head of commanding officer Colonel Henry Blake to get her way, by virtue of her sexual influence over the many Generals she has dated. Another running gag involves Margaret repeatedly answering questions addressed to Frank, so that Colonel Blake, for instance, will effectively hold a conversation with Margaret while addressing her as Frank.¹⁴

Also like the women that antagonize Philip Marlowe, Margaret is unable to handle the masculine privilege of heavy drinking. She is far from a depraved alcoholic like Jessie Florian, but like Helen Grayle, or the Sternwood sisters in *The Big Sleep*, she is excessively voracious (and a bit sloppy) when she does drink. The first time she gets drunk, while celebrating the rumor of a ceasefire with Frank, she threatens to kill herself in despair, believing that Frank soon will be returning stateside to his wife.¹⁵ The next occasion Margaret finds to get drunk is similar: Margaret is frustrated with her Army life upon finding out a nurse she met in training has married a now-wealthy doctor whom Margaret earlier turned down. "I'd a loved him if I'da known!" she exclaims upon seeing

¹⁴ See, for instance, Loretta Swit, Larry Linville and McLean Stevenson, "Radar's Report," *M*A*S*H*, season 2, episode 3, directed by Jackie Cooper, aired on CBS September 29, 1973 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

¹⁵ Loretta Swit and Larry Linville, "Ceasefire," *M*A*S*H*, season 1, episode 23, directed by Earl Bellamy, aired on CBS March 18, 1973 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

a picture of the couple's apparently expensive home. Expecting to transfer to another unit shortly, Margaret gets stumbling drunk just before a large group of wounded Marines arrive at the 4077th MASH.¹⁶ As he makes clear in a season 3 episode, Hawkeye has no respect or tolerance for doctors (all men on *M*A*S*H*, with one significant exception) who would go into the operating room drunk.¹⁷ In Margaret's case, he and Trapper help the head nurse sober up as much as possible and, after a successful shift in the O.R., taunt Margaret about the embarrassing revelations she drunkenly forfeited the night before. Though she is generally a resolute professional, Margaret's inability to maintain her professional bearing when offered a drink comes as no surprise to Hawkeye or Trapper. That inability only confirms their suspicions of women in positions of authority.

As with hard-boiled detectives like the Continental Op, Philip Marlowe, or even Mike Hammer, Hawkeye's appeal is grounded in his uniquely sound moral bearings and professional competence, paired with and signified by masculine mastery of alcohol which borders on the superhuman. The title of the complete series DVD collection—*M*A*S*H: The Martinis and Medicine Collection*—suggests as much. The cast changes throughout the sitcom's eleven-year run, which saw every major actor except Alan Alda, as Hawkeye, and Loretta Swit as Margaret, replaced by a new character or actor, further suggest the central importance of the lone-wolf private eye and *femme fatale* characters to *M*A*S*H*'s mass appeal. Indeed, actor Wayne Rogers has explained that he quit the role

¹⁶ Alan Alda, Wayne Rogers, and Loretta Swit, "Hot Lips and Empty Arms," *M*A*S*H*, season 2, episode 14, directed by Jackie Cooper, aired on CBS December 15, 1973 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

¹⁷ Alan Alda and Robert Alda, "The Consultant," *M*A*S*H*, season 3, episode 17, directed by Gene Reynolds, aired on CBS January 21, 1975 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

of Trapper John after three seasons because he expected the show to be ensemble-oriented rather than Hawkeye-focused.¹⁸ But if nothing else, a bit of dialogue in the season 1 episode “I Hate a Mystery” should have given Rogers an early clue that *M*A*S*H* would be driven more by Hawkeye’s individualistic hard-boiled appeal than by the ensemble high jinks of the novel and film. At a climactic dinner-party-like scene that Hawkeye has staged to reveal the thief of various personal items around camp, Hawkeye appears dressed in a khaki raincoat and hat, cigarette in gloved hand. “Who does he think he is?” Frank demands of no one in particular. “The Thin Man!” Trapper comes back, a little drunkenly, as he lifts his martini glass.¹⁹ Though he’s just quipping, responding to the absurd situation at hand, the joke rings true. If Hawkeye is like Hammett’s socialite detective Nick Charles (of the *Thin Man* novel and films), Trapper is most like Nick’s wife Nora, taking part in adventures that would never happen for Trapper in Hawkeye’s absence.

Even when the sitcom does not refer to detective fiction so explicitly, the parallels, particularly in terms of Hawkeye’s character and the work he does in and outside the operating room, are striking. Like the position of fictional private eyes relative to the police dating back to C. Auguste Dupin, Hawkeye’s unique position as a military officer but not a soldier affords him the freedom to address injustices in Korea and in the American military with relative independence from the maddening

¹⁸ Wayne Rogers, “*M*A*S*H*: Television’s Serious Sitcom,” Special Features Disc 1, *M*A*S*H: The Martinis and Medicine Collection* (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

¹⁹ Alan Alda, Larry Linville and Wayne Rogers, “I Hate a Mystery,” *M*A*S*H*, season 1, episode 10, directed by Hy Averback, aired on CBS November 26, 1972 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

bureaucracy and firm hierarchy of the Army. Mickey Spillane, with characteristic lack of subtlety, has Mike Hammer articulate the private eye's independence at the outset of *I, the Jury*. After Hammer vows vengeance for his murdered Army buddy Jack Williams, police officer Pat Chambers warns him,

“Mike, lay off. For God’s sake, don’t go off half-cocked about this. I know you too well. You’ll start shooting up anyone connected with this and get in a jam you’ll never get out of.”

“I’m over it now, Pat. Don’t get excited. From now on I’m after one thing, the killer. You’re a cop, Pat. You’re tied down by rules and regulations. There’s someone over you. I’m alone. I can slap someone in the puss and they can’t do a damn thing. No one can kick me out of my job. Maybe there’s nobody to put up a huge fuss if I get gunned down, but then I still have a private cop’s license with the privilege to pack a rod, and they’re afraid of me. I hate hard, Pat. When I latch on to the one behind this they’re going to wish they hadn’t started it. Some day, before long, I’m going to have my rod in my mitt and the killer in front of me. I’m going to watch the killer’s face. I’m going to plunk one right in his gut, and when he’s dying on the floor I may kick his teeth out.

“You couldn’t do that. You have to follow the book because you’re a Captain of Homicide.”²⁰

In the season 2 episode “For the Good of the Outfit,” Hawkeye and Trapper similarly articulate their position relative to the U. S. Army (without any of Hammer’s bloodlust). When Hawkeye approaches Colonel Blake with knowledge that American forces are

²⁰ Mickey Spillane, *I, the Jury* (New York: Signet, 1982), Kindle edition, chap. 1.

responsible for the destruction of a peaceful Korean village and demands that a report be filed for a potential investigation, Colonel Blake warns him, “Pierce, hold it. Look, this is a very serious charge. I mean, you’ve got to have some proof, for Pete’s sake. Let’s not go off half-cocked.” When Trapper arrives with evidence that the shell fragments he and the other MASH surgeons extracted from Korean civilians are from American weapons, Blake adds to his previous warning, “I just want to remind you how thrilled the Army is about people who rock the boat.”

“We’re not in *the* Army.” Trapper retorts.

“That is, we’re in the army, but we’re not Army. Little ‘a’ as opposed to big ‘A,’” Hawkeye clarifies. Like his counterpart in Richard Hooker’s novel, Hawkeye knows that his indispensability as a surgeon, as well as the lowered expectations for military comportment from Army doctors, means that he can push the envelope a little further than a regular Army soldier.²¹ And while Hawkeye is not out for blood like Hammer, he is determined to bring killers to justice, even if, as Colonel Blake warns Hawkeye, “the Army’s gonna put your big ‘A’ and your little ‘a’ in a sling” if he and Trapper file their report.

Hard-Boiled Masculinity and (New) Temperance Feminism

Of course, there is a significant difference between Hammer’s anti-authoritarianism and Hawkeye’s. Hammer works outside the police force, according to his own account, in order to do their job more efficiently and effectively (to put it

²¹ Alan Alda, Wayne Rogers, and McLean Stevenson, “For the Good of the Outfit,” *M*A*S*H*, season 2, episode 4, directed by Jackie Cooper, aired on CBS October 6, 1973 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

mildly). While Hawkeye sometimes circumvents official military channels to make his military hospital more efficient and effective, he also often defies the military bureaucracy and hierarchy in order to address injustices committed by the American military itself, as he does in “For the Good of the Outfit.” As a reflection of broad antiwar sentiment in the final years of the Vietnam War and the American presence in Saigon, *M*A*S*H* is a product of its historical moment in the same way that *Red Harvest* is distinctly a novel of and about the Prohibition era. At the same time, *M*A*S*H* illustrates the continued viability, in the early 1970s, of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity as the gendered response to the corrupted public sphere that Hammett and other *Black Mask* writers established in the Prohibition era. However, as the sitcom aired on into the Carter-Reagan era, it also dramatized the fading mainstream viability of hard-boiled fiction’s critique of corruption as a specifically feminine intrusion into the masculine public sphere. The sitcom’s shift, driven by second-wave feminism, was undoubtedly progressive in tone. The terms by which the show shifted, however, with a greater emphasis on family life and dangers to children (even in *M*A*S*H*’s largely childless military setting), were nothing new in American cultural responses to alcohol use.

As I argue in the introduction, the heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine hero first emerged not only in reaction to perceived feminine incursions into the public sphere but also as a narrative response to the demonization of heavy-drinking men in Gothic temperance fiction. As feminist scholars have demonstrated, temperance rhetoric gave nineteenth-century American women a language in which to speak of otherwise unspeakable domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other manifestations of gender

inequality.²² As overwrought as temperance literature so often was, it undoubtedly served an important narrative function for nascent feminist consciousness in America. While hard-boiled detective fiction addressed very real concerns about corruption in American public life, it also represented a narrative turn away from, and in fact against, the feminism of temperance literature.

When temperance rhetoric reentered public discourse in the late 1970s, the language of home protection no longer sounded so progressive as it had a century earlier. However, it is no coincidence that the new temperance movement emerged alongside substantial gains for women in American (private and public) life. As Philip Jenkins argues, the rhetoric of child protection pervaded political discourse between 1975 and 1986, empowering conservatives but also addressing issues of concern across the political spectrum. Whereas the New Left of the 1960s had advocated individual liberty in sexual behavior, drug use, and religious practice, the political rhetoric of the Carter-Reagan era stressed the danger that a lack of restraint among consenting adults in these and other areas of social life posed to children, “who by definition could not give informed consent.”²³ This narrative framing would have been familiar to a nineteenth-century reader of temperance fiction, which often displays much less concern for the fate of the

²² See Elizabeth Renker, “Herman Melville, Wife Beating, and the Written Page,” *American Literature* 66, no. 1 (March 1994): 123-150, doi: 10.2307/2927436; and Karen Sanchez-Eppler, “Temperance in the Bed of a Child: Incest and Social Order in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature*, ed. David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 60-92.

²³ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13-14.

drinker himself than for the children he fails to feed when he, for instance, falls face first into a puddle on his way home from a binge, passes out, and drowns.²⁴

There is little question that the emergent conservative and religious rhetoric of family values in the Carter-Reagan era entailed a backlash against feminist gains. At the same time, though, the era's emphasis on child protection entailed greater surveillance and tighter control of men's behavior as well as women's. "Running through the domestic threats of these years is the sense that men had to learn to restrain their hedonistic impulses, which posed such a threat to vulnerable women and children. John Wayne symbolized an older, mythical America, while the modern nation produced John Wayne Gacy."²⁵ In terms of addressing men's potentially harmful or lethal drinking behaviors, the change in these years is one of emphasis. While *The Lost Weekend* emphasizes Don Birnam's need to accept help so as not to kill himself with alcohol, made-for-TV movies like *Shattered Spirits* (1986) or *The Candy Lightner Story* (1983) emphasize the danger a heavy drinker poses to others (his family and other parents' children, respectively).

To be sure, public advocacy against the recently-named condition of fetal alcohol syndrome in the late 1970s led to greater policing of women's drinking in the name of protecting children as well.²⁶ But the new temperance rhetoric exemplified by Mothers

²⁴ The fate that befalls Edward Harris in Frances Dana Gage, "Tales of Truth (No. 1)," in *Water Drops from Women Writers: A Temperance Reader*, ed. Carol Mattingly (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 47-53.

²⁵ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 19.

²⁶ Ron Roizen, "How Does the Nation's 'Alcohol Problem' Change from Era to Era?," in *Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States, 1800-2000*, ed. Sarah W. Tracy and Caroline Jean Acker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 69-71.

Against Drunk Driving (MADD) particularly caught on in political and popular culture. As Ron Roizen astutely notes, the name alone of the era's most iconic alcohol-related advocacy group marks the change in drinking mores. "MADD's angry acronym...hints that the alcoholism paradigm may have failed to provide adequate social voice to the victims of alcohol-related harm and for the symbolic expression of their opprobrium or desire for vengeance."²⁷ New temperance rhetoric reflected not only a greater emphasis on individual evil than on social dysfunction, in everything from horror movies to criminal justice reform, in what Jenkins calls "the post-1975 decade."²⁸ It also returned some of the blame for social ills to heavy-drinking men, blame that heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity had elided for half a century.

In its preoccupation with public corruption paired with nostalgically gendered characters and alcoholic imagery, twentieth-century hard-boiled crime fiction is both progressive and reactionary. The same can be said of the emergent political discourse post-1975. On the one hand, an understanding of social ills as the work of evildoers, "irrational monsters driven by uncontrollable violence and lust,"²⁹ gave weight to conservative law-and-order solutions. Whereas violent criminals were the inevitable result of official hypocrisy under Prohibition in *Red Harvest*, to even left-of-center politicians in the 1990s they were simply irredeemable villains—"super predators. No conscience, no empathy"³⁰—requiring more robust policing and punishment. Such an

²⁷ Roizen, "How Does the Nation's 'Alcohol Problem' Change," 75.

²⁸ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 10-13.

²⁹ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 12.

³⁰ Anne Gearan and Abby Phillip, "Clinton Regrets 1996 Remark on 'Super-Predators' After Encounter with Activist," *Washington Post*, February 25, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/02/25/clinton-heckled-by-black-lives-matter-activist/?utm_term=.93f7b9404546.

understanding of American society, as being “threatened by legions of faceless demons,”³¹ had a disproportionate effect on real people with black and brown faces. However, as the focus on individual wrongdoing or outright evil in political and cultural discourse waxed, explicitly prejudiced speech and popular culture imagery often waned.

In hard-boiled crime fiction, as I will demonstrate with the example of Lawrence Sanders’ *Matthew Scudder* novel series, these broader cultural changes are reflected by a greater emphasis on irrational serial killers and a shift away from gendered alcoholic symbolism, resulting in a fundamental change of terrain for the genre. For *M*A*S*H*, the most popular televisual representation of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity in the early 1970s, the changing culture meant cast and character changes that softened the sitcom’s tone and shifted its generic emphasis away from the hard-boiled. Eventually, it meant the end of the show, first in terms of its anti-authoritarian moral bearing and then in terms of its actual continued production.

Carry Nation in the O.R.

As Margaret transforms from *femme fatale* to feminist heroine in mid-to-late 1970s episodes of *M*A*S*H*, Hawkeye is increasingly tempered in his often predatory sexual conquests. He also periodically faces hard truths about his alcohol use up until the final season of the sitcom, in which the dialogue is all but apologetic for the show’s early hard-boiled style.

“Alcoholics Unanimous,” a season 3 episode, is the first to focus on drinking as a primary point of conflict between characters. In charge while Colonel Blake is away,

³¹ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 2.

Major Burns enacts prohibition throughout the camp. Hawkeye and Trapper, in their distress over the difficulty of circumventing Frank's new rule, briefly worry that maybe they do share a drinking problem. On the whole, though, Frank's prohibition and its ultimate, total failure reiterate the arbitrary and hypocritical nature of military authority and reflect again *M*A*S*H's* close generic relationship to hard-boiled crime fiction. Importantly, though, Margaret defies Frank by getting drunk with Hawkeye and Trapper and thus hints at the direction her character will eventually take.³²

The first episode of season 4 makes it clear that the change in Margaret's character is not yet lasting. Trapper's replacement, B. J. Hunnicutt, dashes Frank and Margaret's hopes that a new surgeon will bring military decorum with him to the camp by arriving drunk after a boozy ride from the airport with Hawkeye.³³ Margaret clearly remains on the wrong side of the sitcom's hard-boiled masculine heroes, as is reiterated when Hawkeye and B. J. likewise counter-indoctrinate their new "regular Army" commanding officer, Colonel Potter, by plying him with moonshine from the still that Frank once ordered dismantled.³⁴

Not until season 6 do the weaknesses of Hawkeye's heavy-drinking hard-boiled character come under sustained scrutiny. In the season 3 episode "The Consultant," Hawkeye shuns a medical consultant visiting the 4077th MASH who, overcome with the

³² Alan Alda, Larry Linville, and Loretta Swit, "Alcoholics Unanimous," *M*A*S*H*, season 3, episode 9, directed by Hy Averback, aired on CBS November 12, 1974 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

³³ Alan Alda, Mike Farrell, and Loretta Swit, "Welcome to Korea," *M*A*S*H*, season 4, episode 1, directed by Gene Reynolds, aired on CBS September 12, 1975 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

³⁴ Alan Alda, Mike Farrell, and Harry Morgan, "Change of Command," *M*A*S*H*, season 4, episode 2, directed by Gene Reynolds, aired on CBS September 19, 1975 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

stark mortal reality of a hospital so close to the front, gets drunk before he is to demonstrate a new surgical technique.³⁵ Even though Hawkeye frequently has been called to the operating room in the middle of a martini, he is confident enough in his firm moral bearing to take a hard line against Dr. Borelli's (apparently more substantial) negligence. The season 6 episode "Fallen Idol," as its title indicates, marks the limit of Hawkeye's superhuman capacity for intoxicated competence. Distraught over an injury Radar sustained on a trip to a Seoul brothel that Hawkeye suggested, Hawkeye goes into the operating room badly hungover. When he has to leave the O. R. upon a wave of nausea, Hawkeye's reputation in the camp is damaged, particularly with Radar, the company clerk who had theretofore idolized the surgeon. Their reconciliation at the end of the episode is marked, first, by a trade of beverages—Hawkeye drinks Radar's grape soda and Radar drinks Hawkeye's beer—and second, by Hawkeye's saluting Radar upon presenting him with a Purple Heart.³⁶ From "Fallen Idol" on, Hawkeye is repeatedly thus humbled as a heavy drinker, womanizer, and anti-authoritarian, although he never relinquishes any of these traits.

As its heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine hero is so humbled, *M*A*S*H* becomes more the ensemble affair for which Wayne Rogers had hoped (though without the broad humor Alan Alda feared). The most dramatic change to this effect is that the femme fatale becomes a new character type altogether: both a close, reliable friend of the

³⁵ Alan Alda and Robert Alda, "The Consultant," *M*A*S*H*, season 3, episode 17, directed by Gene Reynolds, aired on CBS January 21, 1975 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

³⁶ Alan Alda and Gary Burghoff, "Fallen Idol," *M*A*S*H*, season 6, episode 2, directed by Alan Alda, aired on CBS September 27, 1977 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

hard-boiled hero and a powerful protagonist in her own right. Two season 7 episodes declare these changes, first by tamping down the oversized role of Hawkeye and then by asserting Margaret's power and independence. In the Emmy-winning episode "Inga,"³⁷ the titular Swedish doctor visiting the 4077th MASH both rebuffs Hawkeye's attempts to woo her and outperforms him in the operating room. When Hawkeye complains later that he is bothered by the way Inga showed him up, Margaret not only defends Inga but also tells off Hawkeye for treating Inga and all the nurses in camp as subordinates and sex objects. Margaret ends her diatribe with a jab about Hawkeye's believing women cannot get along without his "fabulous electric lips," and thereby suggests a change in gendered symbolism as the sitcom moved away from its early hard-boiled tone: it is Hawkeye, not Margaret—formerly known as "Hot Lips"—who is sexually voracious, even predatory.

When Inga saves one of Major Winchester's patients from unnecessary surgery, Charles rants to his bunkmates about the feminine threat to the masculine professional sphere that Inga represents. "That woman! That inconsiderate, unconscionable, conceited, arrogant, *pushy* woman! ... And that underhanded little nurse! Naturally they, they stick together! Anything to undermine the authority of a man!" Hawkeye responds, "You know something, Charles? Sitting here listening to you spout your bilge, I get a picture clear and sharp of the world's most perfect ass.... I'm referring to me!" Over the course of the episode, Hawkeye moves from referring to himself as "sex itself" to believing he is "the world's most perfect ass" in his relations with women. *M*A*S*H* began its anti-authoritarian, antiwar critique by employing hard-boiled gendered symbolism, whereby masculine realms are shown to be corrupted and undermined by feminine influence. In

³⁷ Wittebols, *Watching M*A*S*H*, 212.

Charles's rant and Hawkeye's response, the initially hard-boiled masculine hero explicitly rejects the gender dynamic of hard-boiled crime fiction. It is more than a happy coincidence that the episode ends with Hawkeye and Margaret heading to the mess tent to watch that most hard-boiled movie star, Humphrey Bogart, in *Casablanca*—even as they recreate that film's final scene as a heterosocial pair.³⁸

While alcohol plays only a minor role in Hawkeye's transformation in "Inga," it occupies a central symbolic role in Margaret's self-assertion three episodes later. To cheer up Margaret after her divorce is finalized, Hawkeye and B. J. take her to the Officer's Club for an evening of heterosocial conviviality, in the episode titled "Hot Lips is Back in Town." Their efforts are successful, and Margaret decides to stop worrying about her relationships with men and instead dedicate herself fully to her Army career. When she later calls upon a General to observe a new triage program she has devised, the General assumes Margaret's ulterior motive is romance, as Hot Lips's would have been. Angrily dismissing the General for not respecting her as a colleague, Margaret toasts herself with the Scotch the General had poured for them both: "Here's to me," she says, choking back her disappointment.³⁹ In this lonely drinking scene, Margaret is both righteous and despairing. In other words, she is hard-boiled.

Margaret's heavy-drinking hard-boiled attitude in this scene represents the assertion of her character as Hawkeye's equal, rather than a complete change of her

³⁸ Alan Alda, Loretta Swit, and David Ogden Stiers, "Inga," *M*A*S*H*, season 7, episode 16, directed by Alan Alda, aired on CBS January 8, 1979 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

³⁹ Alan Alda, Loretta Swit, and Mike Farrell, "Hot Lips is Back in Town," *M*A*S*H*, season 7, episode 19, directed by Charles Dubin, aired on CBS January 29, 1979 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

character. In other words, Margaret becomes Hawkeye's equal but she does not simply replace him as the sitcom's heavy-drinking hard-boiled moral authority. Rather, she represents in this episode the challenge to that masculine moral authority, and to the wisdom of representing it with heavy drinking, that will remain ongoing through the sitcom's eleventh season even as Hawkeye's character maintains his core characteristics.

Indeed, whereas Colonel Blake and Trapper were mostly adjuncts to Hawkeye's masculine moral leadership in the show's early hard-boiled seasons, B. J. and Colonel Potter, along with Margaret, regularly serve as Hawkeye's primary moral guides in later seasons. This shift in character emphasis reflects as it enacts the softening of *M*A*S*H*'s antimilitary and anti-authoritarian tone, as well as the sitcom's strengthened emphasis on the importance of family. When Colonel Potter drinks heavily he does so, for instance, to help repair the relationship between Hawkeye and B. J., after Hawkeye strained their friendship by acting like the military leaders he loathes when serving as commanding officer while Potter was away.⁴⁰ When B. J. drinks heavily, he does it out of despair for missing his daughter's childhood by serving in Korea.⁴¹ While B. J. sometimes jokes about the state of his liver, neither he nor any other character seriously questions his, Colonel Potter's, or Margaret's relationship with alcohol. More than once, however, and even in the absence of Major Burns's prohibitionist moralism, Hawkeye's drinking raises his own and others' concerns.

⁴⁰ Alan Alda, Mike Farrell, and Harry Morgan, "Commander Pierce," *M*A*S*H*, season 7, episode 1, directed by Burt Metcalfe, aired on CBS September 18, 1978 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

⁴¹ Alan Alda and Mike Farrell, "Period of Adjustment," *M*A*S*H*, season 8, episode 6, directed by Charles S. Dubin, aired on CBS October 22, 1979 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

One season 8 episode in particular severs the once given correlation between Hawkeye's moral authority and his heavy drinking. "Bottle Fatigue" begins with Hawkeye's colleagues reassuring him about his exceptionally high tab at the Officer's Club, largely by emphasizing that they all are driven to drink more than they would otherwise under the uniquely harrowing conditions of war. "When I go back to civilization, it [my alcohol consumption] will return to normal, as it will for all of us," Charles confidently claims. Hawkeye is no longer so confident in his control over his heavy habit and decides to stop drinking. Before Hawkeye makes clear that this sobriety is only a weeklong experiment, Colonel Potter tries to convince him that his newly-avowed temperance is unnecessary and assures Hawkeye that "a two-ton bar tab is no reason to take the pledge." That Hawkeye persists with his week of sobriety despite his drinking companions' reassurances actually serves, at first, to reassert his individualistic hard-boiled morality. After all, the hard-boiled detective's heavy drinking only works as a symbol of his unique moral authority if his heavy drinking is in fact unique, and Hawkeye's is only unique by degree among *M*A*S*H's* major characters, male and female, by season 8. Almost immediately, though, Hawkeye becomes obsessed with the righteousness of his own sobriety. Rather than railing against the injustices and inhumanity of war, he alienates his friends and would-be sex partners with lectures on the virtues of temperance.

Indeed, "Bottle Fatigue" suggests that, without the release the bottle provides for the hard-boiled loner's despair, the hard-boiled masculine hero risks becoming merely a solipsistic irritant. In the end, though, the episode's narrative makes the argument that Hawkeye should be neither of these character types. When a Chinese soldier sneaks a

grenade into the operating room on Hawkeye's fifth day of sobriety, Hawkeye leads the group effort to protect the MASH by holding the soldier's hand over the grenade while Father Mulcahy searches for the removed pin. Mulcahy finds the pin, the soldier is sedated, and everyone is relieved but shaken as they head to the Officer's Club after the O. R. session. They are shocked afresh when Hawkeye orders Scotch. In the parallel scene that began the episode, everyone encourages Hawkeye that he is in control of his heavy drinking and need not deny himself alcoholic release. In this climactic scene, B. J., Colonel Potter, Margaret, Father Mulcahy, and Klinger all express disappointment and discourage Hawkeye from giving up on his sobriety when he is so close to achieving his goal. Hawkeye defends himself by giving a hard-boiled argument for the necessity of his Scotch: "I just spent five minutes serenading a guy who was holding our lives in the palm of his hand." Colonel Potter is sympathetic. As in the opening Officer's Club scene, he offers his advice in the language of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century temperance culture: "Let the boy make up his own mind, folks. If Carry Nation had been in that O.R. with us, she'd be getting a little juiced herself about now."

By remaining confident and vocal about his righteousness while sober, Hawkeye has been functioning as a male Carry Nation, the villainous opposite of the hard-boiled detective, between the episode's two Officer's Club scenes. As such, he is no one's hero. Indeed, his compatriots hail Father Mulcahy, not Hawkeye, as the man of the hour for retrieving the grenade pin. But having now demonstrated that his drinking has gone beyond his control, Hawkeye cannot simply go back to heavy drinking and hard-boiled moral authority. "Look, I admit it, I need this drink," he says, marking his impending sip as the symptom of a diseased alcoholic rather than the convivial release of the hard-

boiled heavy drinker. Facing down the concerned stares of his potential drinking companions, Hawkeye sets his drink back on the bar and gets up to leave. “I’ll be back when I want it. Not when I need it,” he says, in control again but thoroughly humbled.⁴²

Reluctant Crusaders and American Nightmares

While Hawkeye has the self-confident moral authority of the heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective for the first three seasons of *M*A*S*H*, he is repeatedly humbled over the show’s later seasons, becoming more a member of a virtuous ensemble than the lone-wolf hero he was in the sitcom’s early years. His periodic struggles to control his heavy drinking are so dramatic because they are symbolically linked to his gendered, anti-military moral authority. By obscuring a clear connection between the alcoholic signifier and hard-boiled signified, *M*A*S*H* changes its generic identity as well as its gendered symbolism and becomes more a wartime medical melodrama than the comedic, hard-boiled antiwar crusade it had been.⁴³ While the diminished importance of Hawkeye’s character is enacted over the course of many seasons, a monologue by B. J. in a season 11 episode effectively serves as the heavy-drinking hard-boiled hero’s honorable

⁴² Alan Alda, David Ogden Stiers, and Harry Morgan, “Bottle Fatigue,” *M*A*S*H*, season 8, episode 16, directed by Burt Metcalfe, aired on CBS January 1, 1980 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

⁴³ While Hawkeye’s struggles to control his drinking are the most pronounced for any major character, it is significant to the show’s turn away from hard-boiled alcoholic symbolism that in a later episode a female character is portrayed sympathetically as she deals with even more intense withdrawal symptoms, including delirium tremens. See Alan Alda, Loretta Swit, and Gail Strickland, “Bottoms Up,” *M*A*S*H*, season 9, episode 15, directed by Alan Alda, aired on CBS March 2, 1981 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

discharge. Struggling to cope with his decision to leave an injured man in a combat zone after his helicopter was hit by enemy fire, B. J. dismisses Hawkeye's reassurances:

"If you didn't cut that rope, you'd be dead yourself now. I would have done it."

"You don't know that. And I hope to God you never have to find out! We sit around here in our Hawaiian shirts and red suspenders. Thumbing our nose at the Army. Drinking home-brewed gin and flouting authority at every turn and feeling oh, so superior to those military fools who kill each other and oh, so self-righteous when we clean up after them. Well good luck to you, pal. I hope you can keep it up. The minute I cut that rope, they made me a soldier."

Rather than righteously indignant, Hawkeye is pensive in response, looking a thousand yards beyond the martini in his hand.⁴⁴ As cultural historian Gil Troy argues, in the early 1980s "*M*A*S*H*, the television show that since 1972 helped Americans deflect their anxieties about Vietnam by laughing at a Korean War sitcom, outlived its usefulness."⁴⁵ By having Hawkeye's closest friend bluntly denounce his heavy-drinking hard-boiled character, and thereby denounce *M*A*S*H*'s original premise, the show's creators acknowledged their own sense of *M*A*S*H*'s cultural irrelevance within the dialogue of the show itself.

Of course, hard-boiled detective fiction did not cease to exist because of the changes in American culture beginning in the 1970s. The genre and its conventions

⁴⁴ Alan Alda and Mike Farrell, "Bombshells," *M*A*S*H*, season 11, episode 6, directed by Charles S. Dubin, aired on CBS November 29, 1982 (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

⁴⁵ Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 116-17.

continued and still continue to thrive in all major media, even though the new temperance and feminist movements of the late twentieth century substantially helped to disconnect long-established gendered alcoholic symbolism in the genre. In a recent study of hard-boiled crime fiction, Leonard Cassuto wonders why “the genre has been taken over by sadistic killers who murder for the sheer pleasure of it. Such characters lurk on the periphery of early crime fiction, but in the last half of the twentieth century they move increasingly toward the center of the genre, where they’re pursued by some unusually domestic detectives.... Why? Where did all these serial killers come from?”⁴⁶

Indeed if, as Raymond Chandler argues, Dashiell Hammett “gave murder back to the kind of people who commit it for reasons,”⁴⁷ only half a century later hard-boiled writers started taking murder away from them again. Likewise, while the personal life of the nameless Continental Op is basically irrelevant to his adventures, the home and family lives of hard-boiled private eyes play vital roles in many hard-boiled novels of the late twentieth century. “The hard-boiled domestic detective coalesces in the crime genre as the guardian of the family—or more accurately, the idea of the family. The serial killer, on the other hand, evolves in fiction... as a malevolent enemy of the same idea, an idea largely unchanged since the nineteenth century.” Cassuto argues that this “softening” of hard-boiled crime fiction came about gradually, beginning in the 1930s, as the genre gave greater evidence of its roots in the domestic concerns of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Leonard Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 1.

⁴⁷ Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder: An Essay,” in *The Simple Art of Murder* (1950; New York: Vintage, 1988), 14.

⁴⁸ Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality*, 16.

More specifically, though, I argue that hard-boiled detective fiction in the late twentieth century imperfectly aligned itself with the Gothicism of nineteenth-century temperance fiction. By pitting the masculine, heavy-drinking private detective against the greedy femininity corrupting the masculine public sphere, hard-boiled detective fiction of the previous half century reacted to earlier Gothic temperance fiction which portrayed heavy-drinking men as existential threats to women and children. Hard-boiled crime fiction implicitly (and often explicitly) blamed women for Prohibition and, by extension, all public corruption. While the midcentury alcoholism movement acknowledged that men's heavy drinking could have lethal consequences, it also shifted blame from heavy drinkers to an ill-defined disease, leaving intact the possibility of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine moral authority.

Second-wave feminism and the new temperance movement of the late twentieth century, however, proved to be substantial challenges to heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine moral authority. While the *femme fatale* remains a vital character type in American popular culture, her role in hard-boiled detective fiction has been substantially diminished. Serial killers, manifestations of unlikely and almost otherworldly horror, have taken her place. Meanwhile, facing the possibility of embodying such horror himself, the heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective has had to cut back or cut out his drinking (rather as fictional African American detectives have always done).

The first five of Lawrence Block's Matthew Scudder novels, originally published from 1976 to 1982, narrate the genre's turn from heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity to new temperance Gothicism. Formerly committed to midcentury white masculinity and institutional moral authority, Matthew Scudder is, at the outset of the novel series, adrift

and uncertain about all institutions and associations with his fellow Americans. Thanks largely to his participation in Alcoholics Anonymous, by the end of *Eight Millions Ways to Die* (1982) Scudder has begun to establish new professional, familial, and spiritual bonds with women and men, guided by a simplified moral outlook in the face of increasingly monstrous threats to his clients.

Like all but one of the first five novels in the Matthew Scudder series, the very first novel, *The Sins of the Fathers* (1976), begins at Armstrong's, "a good sound saloon with dark wood walls and a stamped tin ceiling."⁴⁹ While Scudder frequents several bars in his neighborhood on a regular basis, Armstrong's is his clear favorite and the bar staff know him well. Unlike his hard-boiled predecessors, however, Scudder does not while away his hours at Armstrong's in search of a mythic homosocial conviviality. Scudder's life, as he narrates, "has been deliberately restructured to minimize involvement in the lives of others."⁵⁰ To be sure, Scudder is somewhat annoyed to be involving himself with Cale Hanniford, the businessman across the table who hires Scudder to find information about his murdered daughter, Wendy. Scudder explains to Hanniford, as he does in some context in every novel, how he went from being a police officer to working as infrequently as possible as an unlicensed private detective:

"I was off duty one night in the summer. I was in a bar in Washington Heights where cops didn't have to pay for their drinks. Two kids held up the place. On their way out they shot the bartender in the heart. I chased them into the

⁴⁹ Lawrence Block, *The Sins of the Fathers* (1976; New York: Avon, 1991), 4.

⁵⁰ Block, *Sins of the Fathers*, 12.

street. I shot one of them dead and caught the other one in the thigh. He's never going to walk right again."

"I see."

"No, I don't think you do. That wasn't the first time I ever killed anyone. I was glad the one died and sorry the other recovered."

"Then—"

"One shot went wide and ricocheted. It hit a seven-year-old girl in the eye. The ricochet took most of the steam off the bullet. An inch higher and it probably would have glanced off her forehead. Would have left a nasty scar but nothing much worse than that. This way, though, nothing but soft tissue, and it went right into her brain. They tell me she died instantly." I looked at my hands. The tremor was barely visible. I picked up my cup and drained it. I said, "There was no question of culpability. As a matter of fact, I got a departmental commendation. Then I resigned. I just didn't want to be a cop anymore."⁵¹

Scudder's accidental killing of Estrellita Rivera, the seven-year-old described above, set him totally adrift. After the incident, he no longer wanted to be a policeman, "or a husband, or a father. Or a productive member of society."⁵² Having therefore left his wife and two sons on Long Island, Scudder moved into a residential hotel in Manhattan from which he works just enough to cover his expenses without any of the formality and structure of police work, or even of licensed private detective work.

⁵¹ Block, *Sins of the Fathers*, 15-16.

⁵² Block, *Sins of the Fathers*, 15.

The only activity Scudder pursues with any regularity is drinking. As with his motivation to quit the police force, Scudder's compulsion to drink is not one he spends much time examining in the first few novels of the series. An exchange in the first chapter of *Sins* between Scudder and Trina, an Armstrong's waitress, is perhaps the most revealing of any dialogue on the subject in the first three novels. After Hanniford leaves and Trina brings Scudder a fresh cup of his preferred beverage, coffee with bourbon, she notices that Scudder seems disturbed.

“Troubles, Matt?”

“Not really. Things to do, and I'd rather not do them.”

“You'd rather just sit here and get drunk.”

I grinned at her. “When did you ever see me drunk?”

“Never. And I never saw you when you weren't drinking.”

“It's a nice middle ground.”

“Can't be good for you, can it?”

I wished she would touch my hand again. Her fingers were long and slender, her touch very cool. “Nothing's much good for anybody,” I said.

“Coffee and booze. It's a very weird combination.”

“Is it?”

“Booze to get you drunk, and coffee to keep you sober.”

I shook my head. “Coffee never sobered anybody. It just keeps you awake. Give a drunk plenty of coffee and you've got a wide-awake drunk on your hands.”

“That what you are, baby? A wide-awake drunk?”

“I’m neither,” I told her. “That’s what keeps me drinking.”⁵³

Already resigned to not being “wide awake,” Scudder, like so many hard-boiled detectives before him, seeks instead the reprieve of drunkenness that never comes.

What sets Scudder apart from the heavy-drinking detectives that precede him is how thoroughly isolated he is from all the “wide awake” institutions that structure society. Indeed, the only thing keeping Scudder from complete alcoholic dissipation and death is his one guiding moral principle: murder is evil, and when called upon Scudder is obligated to mete out justice in response. This principle allows Scudder to feel justified in shooting the robbers who needlessly shot to death the bartender in Washington Heights. It is also why Scudder is shaken to his core over getting away with killing an innocent person, especially a child, because the human institution of the New York Police Department perhaps arbitrarily granted him authority over life and death. Indeed, it is only his moral sense of the sanctity of human life that has kept Scudder from taking his own life, as he explains to Reverend Vanderpoel, the minister he reveals to be Wendy Hanniford’s murderer in *Sins*. The lives of killers are, naturally, exempt from Scudder’s code: Scudder gives Reverend Vanderpoel the option of killing himself with sleeping pills if the Reverend would prefer to die without the police and his congregation knowing that he has killed a prostitute.⁵⁴

Block published the first three Scudder novels in short order in 1976, and in all three the unlicensed detective deals with New York in the late 1970s on the same basic moral terms. Scudder drinks and drifts through a city of overburdened and necessarily

⁵³ Block, *Sins of the Father*, 17-18.

⁵⁴ Block, *Sins of the Father*, 262-69.

corrupt police, financially savvy and independent prostitutes, preternaturally preserved gay bar owners, and both wise and weasely informants, among others. Scudder, who himself “would have found it hard to support a family without” participating in police corruption when he was on the force,⁵⁵ accepts moral ambiguity and passes no particular judgment on any of the flawed characters in these novels, short of the killers. Scudder is even prepared to let a pedophilic politician go on with his life and career until he surmises that the politician is indirectly responsible for a murder.⁵⁶ If Block had continued writing Scudder novels according to his formula for the first three, Matthew Scudder would mostly differ from the Continental Op or Philip Marlowe in that his personal history bears upon his work and identity as an independent moral guide to the corrupted public sphere. The novels also differ from earlier examples of the genre by the absence of *femmes fatales* as scapegoats for that corruption. None of the murderers in the first five Scudder novels are women, though women are often victims. When murderous men argue that women are indirectly responsible for what they have done, as when Reverend Vanderpoel claims that Wendy Hanniford was “evil” and inspired his son (who was first accused of the crime) to murder, Scudder rejects the justification.⁵⁷

By the fourth novel in the series, published five years after the first three, Scudder’s moral world is narrowing to a point that suggests he might soon lose interest in justifications and background stories to murder altogether. The mystery of *A Stab in the Dark* (1981) begins after a serial killer, known as the Icepick Prowler, confesses to seven of the eight murders attributed to him nine years earlier. The father of the eighth victim

⁵⁵ Block, *Sins of the Father*, 15.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Block, *Time to Murder and Create* (1976; New York: Avon, 1991), 252-63.

⁵⁷ Block, *Sins of the Father*, 95-106, 260-61.

hires Scudder to find the copycat murderer who killed his daughter, Barbara Ettinger. The murder at the heart of the mystery, then, is a transitional one in the Scudder series.

Whereas the killers in Block's first three novels have complex motivations, none of which include insanity or bloodlust, *A Stab in the Dark* takes a half-step into the realm of serial killers who kill for pleasure or out of some animalistic brand of madness. Barbara's killer is not the Icepick Prowler, and he had reasons other than insanity for killing Barbara—namely, as practice for killing his blind wife, whom he was too ashamed simply to leave at that time. But he never did kill his wife after killing Barbara and confesses to Scudder, "I killed [Barbara] because I was afraid to kill my wife and I had to kill someone.... I *had* to.... I couldn't get it out of my mind."⁵⁸ Later, he makes the point even more plainly: "I think I was out of my mind. In fact I'm sure of it. Something about seeing [one of the Icepick Prowler's victims], those pools of blood in her eyes, those stab wounds all over her body, it did something to me. It made me crazy, and I went on being crazy until Barbara Ettinger was dead."⁵⁹ Scudder is not yet hunting down animalistic serial killers, but by bringing a temporarily insane copycat killer to justice he's moving further into a simpler moral world, one in which evil requires violent punishment rather than detailed diagnosis.

At the same time, Scudder begins to find it hard to justify his drinking as a symptom of moral malaise. Toward the conclusion of *In the Midst of Death*, the third Scudder novel, the unlicensed private eye is feeling more optimistic than ever. He has vindicated his client Jerry Broadfield, the cop framed for murder shortly after informing

⁵⁸ Lawrence Block, *A Stab in the Dark* (1981; Middletown, DE: Telemachus Press, 2012), 185.

⁵⁹ Block, *Stab in the Dark*, 187-88.

on the department in a corruption investigation. Not only has Scudder restored moral order by bringing the real killer to justice. By discovering that the police did not frame Broadfield, Scudder vindicates his own sense of the moral limits of police corruption. Additionally, Scudder might be in love with Broadfield's wife, Diana, who is prepared to leave her failing marriage to be with Scudder. With his private and public worlds looking more just and kind than they have in some time, Scudder cuts far back on his drinking while he waits to hear from Diana. After several days without a call, Scudder reads in the *New York Post* that Jerry Broadfield has been killed. Eddie Koehler, a friend on the force, seconds Scudder's suspicion that police officers killed Broadfield, and Scudder is certain that her husband's murder will keep Diana from getting involved with him. "Matt, you don't have to crawl into the bottle just because of this. It doesn't change anything," Eddie tells Scudder. But Scudder has already given up on his reformation. "People don't get to change things," he says more to himself than to Eddie. "Things change people once in a while, but people don't change things."⁶⁰

In *A Stab in the Dark*, "things," namely alcohol, do begin to change Scudder. Whereas he spends the first three novels close to the edge of control over his drinking, Scudder slips over a few times in *Stab*. He gets drunk while interviewing a gay couple who knew the victim, and skips one scheduled meeting with the victim's sister just so he can keep drinking away a dreary day.⁶¹ What worries the detective the most, though, is his handling of a potentially dangerous encounter during that day of "maintenance drinking." Approached by a young man asking Scudder to light his cigarette, Scudder

⁶⁰ Lawrence Block, *In the Midst of Death* (1976; New York: Avon, 1992), 242-43.

⁶¹ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 46, 149.

beats the man and takes from his pockets a gravity knife and roll of cash. When he realizes the next day that he was very drunk during the encounter, he worries that his instincts may have failed him, leading him to attack and rob someone who meant him no harm.⁶²

If moral helplessness leads Scudder to pick up drinking again at the end of *In the Midst of Death*, Scudder's loss of control in *A Stab in the Dark* suggests that he is nearing the end of the anodyne's effectiveness. Indeed, alcohol begins to cause Scudder more grief than the murder he is investigating in *Stab*. "Great system," he narrates as he drinks away a hangover: "the poison and the antidote come in the same bottle."⁶³ Instead of drinking to cope with an amoral world, Scudder is now drinking to cope with his own drinking.

Burton Havermeyer, Barbara Ettinger's killer, offers Scudder an image of his future if he keeps on drinking. Havermeyer is always drinking when Scudder visits his sparsely-furnished studio apartment, and his drinking shows in his appearance. "He looked to be in his early thirties...pale complected, with narrow shoulders and a beer gut.... He had deep-set brown eyes, heavy jowls and slicked-down dark brown hair, and he hadn't shaved that morning. Neither, come to think of it, had I."⁶⁴ Scudder later regrets that his own dissipation is revealing itself through the broken blood vessels on his face.⁶⁵ A more troubling similarity between himself and Havermeyer is that Havermeyer is wracked with guilt over the life he has taken. Scudder is already troubled by the

⁶² Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 135-41.

⁶³ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 152.

⁶⁴ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 107.

⁶⁵ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 140-41.

accidental killing of Estrellita Rivera, and some of his drunken behavior in *Stab* foretells a new danger: he could be guilty of more intentional but equally misdirected violence if he keeps on drinking.

On the other hand, Jan Keane, Barbara's former employer, offers Scudder a mirror of his present drinking habits as well as the possibility that he might have the ability—and need—to put an end to them. Her character is, in several ways, a representative of the changing times since the Icepick Prowler's activity, and she emerges as a guide through the present for Scudder, whom she recognizes as a fellow dropout. As Scudder interviews Jan about Barbara, Jan's broad-ranging responses suggest that she, like Matthew, is disappointed and uncertain how to proceed with life in 1980s America. Scudder tells Jan that her gossipy former neighbor revealed that Jan left her husband and children for a relationship with another woman. Jan answers that while her first relationship after leaving her husband was with a woman, she did not exactly leave him to fulfill her true sexual identity. "I thought a relationship with a woman might be different in some fundamental way. See, back then was consciousness-raising time," she explains sardonically.⁶⁶ Now she lives alone in a Tribeca loft, working as a sculptor, relieved that her husband has taken the kids with him to California. But despite her independence and success as an artist, Jan is blunt about her dissatisfaction with life, and clearly frustrated that the social and cultural debates begun during "consciousness-raising time" have not been resolved. She refers to the traditionally feminine woman who outed her to Scudder as "Mrs. High School Yearbook," but only shortly after also complaining to the detective about politically correct speech. When discussing the state of her art

⁶⁶ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 88.

career, she brings up a Manhattan gallery owner who showcased her work. “He gave me a one-man show. A one-woman show. A one-person show. Shit, you have to think before you talk nowadays, have you noticed?”⁶⁷

It doesn’t take long for Jan and Matthew to recognize each other as similarly solitary, disappointed people, and it takes Jan only a little longer to recognize Scudder as a heavy drinker like herself. After she broaches the subject by asking, “You’re a drunk, aren’t you?”⁶⁸ the two drink their way through the two bottles of liquor Jan has on hand (Scotch and vodka) before calling the liquor store for more. As indicated by her approach to asking Scudder if he would like a drink, Jan is more inclined than Scudder to see heavy drinking as a problem. Later in the evening, without conversational context she declares, “You know what we are? Me with my sculpture and you with your existential angst, and what we are is a couple of drunks who copped out. That’s all.”

“If you say so,” Scudder responds.

“Don’t patronize me. Let’s face it. We’re both alcoholics.”

“I’m a heavy drinker. That’s a difference.”⁶⁹

This exchange leads into their only disagreement of the evening, over whether Scudder really could quit drinking if he wanted to. But Jan and Matthew make up quickly, and the scene ends with Scudder refilling both their drinks after agreeing to stay the night.

Scudder ultimately does not change Jan’s mind about heavy drinking, though. By the end of the novel she has put their relationship on indefinite hold as she begins to work the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. After getting as far as the door of an A. A.

⁶⁷ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 92-93.

⁶⁸ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 84.

⁶⁹ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 94-95.

meeting himself, Scudder heads to Armstrong's for bourbon, to "take the edge off the brandy rush" of his after-dinner drink.⁷⁰ The novel's ending parallels that of *In the Midst of Death*, and thereby negates that earlier novel's hard-boiled justification for Scudder's drinking. By the end of *Stab*, justice is conclusively served and Jan is unequivocal in her desire to be with Scudder. In other words, none of the reversals of fortune that lead Scudder back to Armstrong's at the end of *In the Midst of Death* befall the detective in *Stab*. However, Scudder still chooses to drink.

If there is any doubt by the end of *Stab* that Jan was right about Scudder being nothing more than a drunk who copped out, Block dashes that doubt in short order in *Eight Million Ways to Die* (1982). After two hospitalizations, the second coming after he is 86'ed at Armstrong's, Scudder struggles against his misgivings to commit to sobriety through A. A. With Jan's (at first hesitant) help, he makes it to his tenth day of sobriety. On his tenth day, he fires a gun for the first time since killing Estrellita Rivera, shooting the novel's murderer four times in the chest. With the case concluded, Scudder almost takes a drink. Instead, he goes to an A. A. meeting where, tearfully, he identifies himself as an alcoholic for the first time.

Scudder's commitment to sobriety, by virtue of his new commitment to an alcoholic identity, is symbolically wedded to his new commitment to moral simplicity. Scudder has known there is evil in the world since the first novel in the series,⁷¹ but by the end of the fifth novel he is much less reflective and thoughtful about his moral obligation to mete out lethal justice. "How did I feel about having killed him?" Scudder

⁷⁰ Block, *A Stab in the Dark*, 202.

⁷¹ As he tells Reverend Vanderpoel in Block, *The Sins of the Father*, 95.

asks himself of Pedro Marquez, the serial killer in *Eight Million Ways to Die*. “I thought it over and decided I felt fine. I didn’t really know anything about the son of a bitch. To understand all is to forgive all, they say, and maybe if I knew his whole story I’d understand where the blood lust came from. But I didn’t have to forgive him. That was God’s job not mine.”⁷² The detective’s new confidence in his earthly righteousness is matched by Marquez’s anonymity and inhumanity. Scudder does not know the killer’s identity until after his death and even then does not worry about what made Marquez a murderer. All Scudder knows is the brutality of the two murders connected to Marquez, and that Marquez was so excited to make Scudder his third victim that he came at the detective not only with a machete but also with an erection.⁷³

Canonical hard-boiled detectives like Philip Marlowe drink in search of an imagined lost homosocial convivial past, correcting as best they can against modernity corrupted by transgressive feminine greed. By the end of *Eight Million Ways to Die*, Matthew Scudder is soberly prepared to kill the monstrous men individually responsible for evil in the world. Whereas Marlowe is a master of heavy drinking surrounded by women who are either disruptive prohibitionists or intrusive alcoholics, Scudder follows the lead of Jan, a woman he loves, to sobriety. Jan, for her part, is an independent woman who involves herself in Scudder’s reformation only at his rather desperate request. In the opening scene of Mickey Spillane’s *I, the Jury*, Mike Hammer claims, “For the first time in my life I felt like crying,” when he sees the dead body of his Army buddy, the very

⁷² Lawrence Block, *Eight Million Ways to Die* (1982; New York: Avon, 1993), 294.

⁷³ Block, *Eight Million Ways to Die*, 292.

embodiment of a lost homosocial past.⁷⁴ Though he may feel like crying, Hammer does not. After Scudder introduces himself as “Matt...an alcoholic” at the A. A. meeting that concludes *Eight Million Ways to Die*, “the goddamnest thing happened. I started to cry.”⁷⁵ Scudder, who earlier betrayed his emotions only by the volume of his drinking, marks the end of his heavy-drinking hard-boiled ethos by soberly crying in a heterosocial therapeutic group meeting.

The central importance of heavy-drinking masculinity to American hard-boiled detective fiction in the twentieth century is evidenced by Block’s apparent ambivalence about how or if to continue the Scudder series beyond the sobering fifth installment. Block did not publish another Scudder novel for several years, and that sixth novel, *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes* (1986), takes place back during Scudder’s heavy drinking days of the mid-1970s. In the seventh and eighth novels, however, Block again wrote Scudder as a detective in his present-day New York City, maintaining sobriety and battling living demons in the form of serial killers. The eighth novel, *A Ticket to the Boneyard* (1990), pits Scudder against such an inhuman psychopath that the novel bears at least as strong a generic resemblance to horror as to detective fiction. It is no wonder that gushing blurbs by Stephen King, the horror publishing phenomenon of the late twentieth century (much as Mickey Spillane was a hard-boiled phenomenon at midcentury⁷⁶), adorn the covers of so many Scudder novels from this period.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Spillane, *I, the Jury*, chap. 1.

⁷⁵ Block, *Eight Million Ways to Die*, 296.

⁷⁶ “The most popular author of the 1950s by far,” according to Sean McCann, “The Hard-Boiled Novel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. Catherine Ross Nickerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 55.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Lawrence Block, *A Ticket to the Boneyard* (New York: Morrow, 1990), back cover.

Indeed, King's widely popular novel *The Shining* (1977), a supernatural temperance tale in which more than one kind of spirit drive a drunken father to terrorize his wife and child, represents the degree to which nineteenth-century temperance themes could resonate in the late twentieth century. The enduring links between Gothic fiction and temperance imagery help explain the coincidence not only of King's pop culture stardom but also the concurrent rise of the slasher horror movie genre alongside the new temperance movement.

Of course, the turn away from the brand of masculinity represented by heavy drinking that had defined the hard-boiled crime genre since the Prohibition era has never been complete. Nor has the *femme fatale* disappeared, or the association between temperance sentiment and women's imagined meddling in the masculine public sphere. Scudder, soberly working on his case in *Eight Million Ways to Die*, pours a bottle of Wild Turkey down the sink while going through a victim's apartment. "I don't know how much sense that made," he narrates. "There was plenty of other booze there and I didn't feel like doing my Carrie [sic] Nation imitation."⁷⁸ Even in the 1980s, Block counted on Carry Nation to resonate as a specifically feminine figure of prohibitionist extremism. What had changed since Hammett's time is the possibility that a private eye might (symbolically) take a hatchet to a shelf of liquor instead of pocketing some to take back to his hotel room.

⁷⁸ Block, *Eight Million Ways to Die*, 195.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: True Detectives

In the late 1970s, while masculine hard-boiled characters like Hawkeye Pierce and Matthew Scudder were humbled in their moral certitude and drinking fortitude, women detectives began to play new and significant roles as heroines of hard-boiled detective fiction. Between 1977 and 1982, authors Marcia Muller, Sue Grafton, and Sara Paretsky all published the first novels in series featuring investigators Sharon McCone, Kinsey Millhone, and V. I. Warshawski, respectively. Over the proceeding four decades, all three authors have continued these seminal women detective series, publishing dozens of novels alongside the many authors, men and women, who have followed them in what Maureen Reddy calls the “feminist counter-tradition” in crime fiction.¹ To be sure, these authors do more than simply apply the conventional characteristics of the hard-boiled detective to female bodies. Just as Chester Himes’s and Walter Mosley’s black detectives embody hard-boiled masculinity differently than Hammett’s and Chandler’s white detectives, the creators of popular women detectives have been (as the subtitle of one of several academic books on the subject puts it) “rewriting the hard-boiled tradition” since the late 1970s.²

¹ Maureen Reddy, “The Feminist Counter-Tradition in Crime: Cross, Grafton, Paretsky, and Wilson,” in *The Cunning Craft: Original Essays on Detective Fiction and Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. Ronald G. Walker and June M. Frazer (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University Press, 1990), 174.

² Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones, *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

The revisions to the hard-boiled detective character that women detectives have brought to the genre—beginning with their gender—dovetail with the moral decline of the masculine, white, heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective. Hard-boiled detectives from the Continental Op to Matthew Scudder are lonely men pining for the homosocial bonds of an imagined convivial past. Women detectives like V. I. Warshawski, as Margaret Kinsman argues, perform their detective work as independent agents within meaningful social networks that often emphasize women’s homosocial bonds over settled heterosexual relationships.³ They also just don’t drink so much. In *Red Harvest*, the Continental Op and Dinah Brand try drinking each other under the table as a negotiating tactic. In *Critical Mass* (2013), a recent Paretsky novel, V. I. Warshawski mentions that her close friend Lotty Herschel gives her a glass of brandy during a late-evening visit, but only to describe “watching the colors change in the glass.”⁴ She never describes actually drinking the brandy. At the conclusion of *The Big Sleep*, Philip Marlowe tries (unsuccessfully) to drink away the “nastiness” of his involvement with the Sternwood sisters.⁵ In Sue Grafton’s Alphabet Series, Kinsey Millhone uses jogging, not drinking, as her primary source of emotional release.⁶

Matthew Scudder’s hard-won commitment to sobriety uniquely dramatizes the fundamental changes to the semiotics of heavy-drinking masculinity in late twentieth-

³ Margaret Kinsman, “Feminist Crime Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. Catherine Ross Nickerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 148-162.

⁴ Sara Paretsky, *Critical Mass* (New York: Signet, 2014), 12.

⁵ Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939; New York: Vintage, 1992), 230-31.

⁶ Mandalit Del Barco, “In ‘Alphabet’ Mysteries, ‘S’ is Really for Santa Barbara,” *NPR.org*, August 15, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/08/15/211655263/in-alphabet-mysteries-s-is-really-for-santa-barbara>.

century hard-boiled detective fiction. However, other male detectives, even drinking detectives, likewise reflect the changes in drinking mores and gender roles in the late twentieth century. Robert B. Parker's private eye Spenser, for instance, gets more pleasure out of cooking than drinking. As Kinsman notes, "many contemporary writers (such as Ian Rankin, Robert Crais, Lee Child) have opened up the emotional and domestic lives of their tough cops and private eyes; and their novels now include interesting women characters who range well beyond the old stereotypes."⁷ In mid-twentieth century American hard-boiled fiction, lonely masculine warriors like Philip Marlowe pitted themselves against the specter of Carry Nation, whose flamboyantly destructive temperance spirit haunted the modern urban public sphere. By the late 1970s, more social, sober, and feminine detectives became necessary to battle the demons of violent masculine excess. If midcentury detectives were haunted by Nation's work to deny masculine appetites, late-twentieth century detectives performed their work in the shadows of Jeffrey Dahmer and Hannibal Lecter—real and imagined figures of monstrous masculine voracity.

Perhaps it is no wonder, then, that the heavy-drinking masculine detectives at the heart of the celebrated first season of the HBO series *True Detective* (2014) sparked so much debate. In print publications and especially online, the site of so much argument about gender and popular culture, journalists and bloggers questioned why a contemporary cable drama with high production values would foreground two men who spend so much time drinking and fighting and so little time engaging meaningfully with women. *New Yorker* television critic Emily Nussbaum is among the series' detractors:

⁷ Kinsman, "Feminist Crime Fiction," 161.

While the male detectives of “True Detective” are avenging women and children, and bro-bonding over “crazy pussy,” every live woman they meet is paper-thin. Wives and sluts and daughters—none with any interior life. Instead of an ensemble, “True Detective” has just two characters, the family-man adulterer Marty, who seems like a real and flawed person (and a reasonably interesting asshole, in [Woody] Harrelson’s strong performance), and Rust, who is a macho fantasy straight out of Carlos Castaneda.... Meanwhile, Marty’s wife, Maggie—played by Michelle Monaghan, she is the only prominent female character on the show—is an utter nothing-burger, all fuming prettiness with zero insides.⁸

Those who defend the show against charges of misogyny often note that while *True Detective*’s narrative unfolds only from the points of view of two men, that narrative and the show’s imagery hardly endorse their worldview. Responding to Nussbaum, Eliana Dockterman asserts on *Time.com*:

It’s time that we all stop assuming TV writers endorse the bad actions of their flawed characters.... When we see “heroic male outlines and closeups of female asses” in the credits, as Nussbaum points out, we are seeing Marty and Russ’ [sic] worldview. They fancy themselves powerful saviors of women, when in fact they are sexist monsters. And they get their comeuppance: in the latest episode, we see Marty...unsuccessfully browsing dates on Match.com and eating a TV dinner

⁸ Emily Nussbaum, “Cool Story, Bro: The Shallow Deep Talk of ‘True Detective,’” *New Yorker*, March 3, 2014, 78-79.

alone in his apartment. Rust, who simply ignores live women in favor of dead ones, has found himself drowning in a can of Lone Star [beer].⁹

Writer and showrunner Nic Pizzolatto apparently sees his characters along the lines of the “sexist monsters” Dockterman identifies. In a commentary track on the season 1 DVD set, Pizzolatto praises T Bone Burnett for scoring the series in a way that shows he understands the “material as well as anybody who’s not me.... and maybe better than me.” Burnett responds, “I know the way it feels.” Pizzolatto rather boldly defines “it” for Burnett: “You know how it feels to be a shitty man.”¹⁰ This is how the male creator of possibly the most popular hard-boiled text of the last decade defines heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity: being a shitty man.

While the first season of *True Detective* is critical of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity, many viewers probably are drawn to the show by nostalgia for the indulgence of masculine desires that Marty and Rust embody. At the same time, for many twenty-first century consumers of popular culture, it is no longer enough for a text to employ a masculine point of view to critique masculinity. Not unreasonably, many viewers expect HBO, a popular outlet that brands itself as a cut above average cable TV, to make an effort to foreground women’s points of view in a medium that has for so long privileged the male gaze. With the internet’s many venues for fan “microcriticism” (in *Los Angeles Times* TV critic Mary McNamara’s useful phrase), Pizzolatto could hardly

⁹ Eliana Dockterman, “*True Detective* Doesn’t Endorse Misogyny, Just Like *Girls* Doesn’t Endorse Narcissism,” *Time*, March 7, 2014, <http://time.com/12708/true-detective-doesnt-endorse-misogyny-just-like-girls-doesnt-endorse-narcissism/>.

¹⁰ Nic Pizzolatto and T Bone Burnett, “Episode 4 Commentary Track,” disc 2, *True Detective: The Complete First Season* (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2014), DVD.

be unaware of this expectation.¹¹ In fact, the *True Detective* creator had an answer ready for a fan who tweeted, “Hey @nicpizzolatto if True Detective looked at feminine characters with the same lens as masculine, it would be PERFECT & MINDBLOWING.” Pizzolatto responded “@friggenawesome One of the detriments of having only two POV characters, both men (a structural necessity). Next season...”¹²

Though he later deleted this tweet,¹³ Pizzolatto followed through on its tacit promise and introduced a woman detective among the main characters of season 2 (2015)—as an anthology series, each season of *True Detective* begins a new story, with new characters in a new setting. For most viewers, this development apparently did not help to make *True Detective* any more perfect or mindblowing. Whereas season 1 spawned generally excellent reviews paired with a debate about a potential “woman problem,”¹⁴ season 2 inspired headlines like “What Went Wrong with ‘True Detective’ Season 2?,”¹⁵ “HBO Reveals Why *True Detective* Season 2 Sucked,”¹⁶ and “Could the

¹¹ Mary McNamara, “The TV We Deserve? ‘True Detective’ Season 2 and the Age of Microcriticism,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-et-st-true-detective-season-two-review-20150620-column.html>.

¹² Qtd. in Dockterman, “*True Detective* Doesn’t Endorse Misogyny.”

¹³ Dockterman, “*True Detective* Doesn’t Endorse Misogyny.”

¹⁴ For one entryway into this debate, see Erin Gloria Ryan, “How *True Detective* Can Solve Its Woman Problem,” *Jezebel*, February 26, 2014, <http://jezebel.com/how-true-detective-can-solve-its-woman-problem-1531657023>.

¹⁵ Sean T. Collins, “What Went Wrong with ‘True Detective’ Season 2?,” *Rolling Stone*, August 10, 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/tv/features/what-went-wrong-with-true-detective-season-2-20150810>.

¹⁶ Jack Shepherd, “HBO Reveals Why *True Detective* Season 2 Sucked,” *Independent*, January 6, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/hbo-reveals-why-true-detective-season-2-sucked-a6798516.html>.

Cancellation of *True Detective* Ring in a New Era for HBO?”¹⁷ While some reviewers make positive note of Rachel McAdams’ performance as Detective Ani Bezzerides,¹⁸ most emphasize their overall disappointment with the starkness of the changes from season 1 to season 2.

The most fascinating of critics’ complaints, in terms of twenty-first century viewers’ genre expectations for hard-boiled detective fiction, is that season 2’s story of almost-impenetrably deep public corruption in Southern California is just so *boring* in comparison to season 1’s search for a single, monstrous, rural serial killer. “Municipal corruption? Railway construction? This is a *lot* less riveting than the first season of *True Detective*, where the cops were chasing a Louisiana serial killer,” Eric Deggans complains on *NPR.org*.¹⁹ Sean T. Collins elaborates on this gripe in *Rolling Stone*: “Then there’s the mystery [of season 2] itself, which was, well, both harder to unravel and far less *mysterious*. Last year’s occult elements may have been a big fake out, but they gave the Yellow King and his minions their *modus operandi*, spurred feverish fan speculation and made the show not just a crime thriller but a horror film in eight installments.”²⁰ Leonard Cassuto’s 2009 argument that the serial killer is America’s “national monster,”

¹⁷ Joanna Robinson, “Could the Cancellation of *True Detective* Ring in a New Era for HBO?,” *Vanity Fair*, May 25, 2016, <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/05/true-detective-cancelled-hbo>.

¹⁸ Including McNamara, “The TV We Deserve?”

¹⁹ Eric Deggans, “Why Isn’t the Second Season of ‘True Detective’ More Surprising?,” *NPR*, June 19, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/06/19/415671805/why-isnt-the-second-season-of-true-detective-more-surprising>.

²⁰ Collins, “What Went Wrong?”

as reflected by the persistence of his particular antagonism in hard-boiled crime fiction, appears still to hold true.²¹

Many critiques of season 2 ignore, or only offhandedly acknowledge, the changes Pizzolatto made to address critics' concerns regarding season 1's gender imbalance. These omissions may imply satisfaction with the inclusion of a woman detective and other more fully realized women characters in season 2. However, one critic's complaint *about* Rachel McAdams's portrayal of Ani Bezzerides actually articulates what I argue makes *True Detective's* revision of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity in its second season truly unique, and the season a potential watershed text in American crime fiction. "There was excitement surrounding season two's surface-level changes," Matt Patches mourns on *Esquire.com*, in reference to the new cast of season 2. "Vince Vaughn might add a dash of comedy. Rachel McAdams could address the critiques against Pizzolatto's macho style. That didn't happen. Vaughn was stifled, McAdams was one of the boys, and Colin Farrell and Taylor Kitsch were two more repressed gents in a sea of repressed gents."²² Patches does not elaborate on what he means by describing Detective Bezzerides as just "one of the boys." However, his criticism brings to my mind the characteristics that set Ani Bezzerides apart from Kinsey Millhone, V. I. Warshawski, and Sharon McCone: Bezzerides fits the mold of heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculinity while approaching her work and her personal concerns from a feminine and feminist perspective.

²¹ Leonard Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 271.

²² Matt Patches, "9 Things We Need in *True Detective* Season 3," *Esquire*, August 10, 2015, <http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a37056/true-detective-season-3/>.

As a heavy-drinking woman investigator, Bezzerides is not alone in contemporary American popular culture. English author Paula Hawkins' bestselling novel *The Girl on The Train* (2015) and its American film adaptation (2016) concern alcoholic divorcee Rachel Watson's personal investigation of a murder committed when she was blackout drunk. Gillian Flynn's bestseller *Dark Places* (2009) cleverly deconstructs the contemporary hard-boiled detective genre's preoccupation with serial killers. In Libby Day's investigation of her brother's alleged Satanic ritual murder of their family, which she survived as a child twenty-five years earlier, the heavy-drinking loner discovers that the truth of the murders is both more complex and banal than a Satanic blood orgy. Finally, as a superheroic comic-book vision of a hard-boiled detective, the titular character of the Netflix series *Jessica Jones* (2015-) apparently includes among her powers the ability to drink endless amounts of whiskey without showing the effects of intoxication. Ani Bezzerides is nonetheless unique from these women in that, unlike Rachel Watson or Libby Day, she is a professional investigator, and unlike Jessica Jones, her competence in her profession is not the result of superwoman powers.

Among the consistencies from season 1 to season 2 of *True Detective* are the mutually constitutive characters of the brooding, contemplative loner detective and his/her partner, the beleaguered family man with a folksy moralistic worldview. Whereas Rust played the former role and Marty the latter in season 1, Ani is the brooding loner of season 2 while Colin Farrell's Ray Velcoro, desperate to maintain custody of his son after a stranger's sexual assault on his wife tore his marriage apart, is the family man. These characters follow the same general trajectory in each season: over roughly the first half of the season, the two detectives are brought together to solve a case. The brooding loner is

dedicated to the job but socially aloof, while the family man is socially open to his partner and others but on a personal path of alcoholic self-destruction. The two unite to bring an official resolution to the case, marked by a violent confrontation with the assumed culprits to end Act I.

Act II begins with the roles of stoicism and hedonism reversed: the family man, in a doomed attempt to maintain his family ties, has gotten (mostly) sober, while the brooding loner drinks more than ever. In both seasons, Rust and Ani approach their former partners to argue that the case they closed in Act I is actually still unsolved, and that they need to work privately to bring the real killer(s) to justice. Both family men, Marty and Ray, end up conceding their failures to keep their families together, finding homosocial (between Marty and Rust) and heterosexual (between Ray and Ani) convivial companionship with their partners instead.

What is remarkable about the change in the specific characters in these roles from the first season to the second is how completely Ani Bezzerides fills the shoes of “macho fantasy” Rust Cohle, and that she maintains Rust’s toughness without his macho masculinity. Early in season 1, Rust says to Marty, lighting a cigarette while driving and unmoved by Marty’s obvious personal turmoil, “The world needs bad men. We keep the other bad men from the door.”²³ Driving at night and smoking an e-cigarette in a season 2 episode, Ani responds to Ray’s question about the knives she always carries by calmly stating, “[The] fundamental difference between the sexes is that one of them can kill the other with their bare hands. Man of any size lays hands on me, he’s going to bleed out in

²³ Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson, “The Locked Room,” *True Detective*, season 1, episode 3, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, aired on HBO January 26, 2014 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2014), DVD.

under a minute.”²⁴ The celebrated grand cinematic gesture of season 1 is a single, action-packed seven-minute shot without cuts, in which Rust joins an Aryan biker gang on a raid of a drug stash house in a poor black neighborhood.²⁵ A similarly bold and suspenseful season 2 scene involves Ani going undercover as a prostitute to infiltrate an orgiastic party for wealthy and powerful California men. While Rust’s infiltration of the biker gang brings him back into the undercover role of his past, which caused him permanent brain damage from excessive drug use, Ani’s infiltration of the party (in which she uses a knife in exactly the way she told Ray she would) dredges up a repressed memory of childhood sexual assault.²⁶

Most of season 1’s narrative unfolds as Marty and Rust separately retell the details of a 1995 investigation to two Louisiana State Police officers in 2012. Early in Rust’s testimony, the grizzled former police detective declares he’s taking a break for a “beer run.” When the two officers interviewing him tell him not to leave, Rust insists they go get the beer for him instead. “It’s Thursday and it’s past noon,” he explains calmly but intensely. “Thursday is one of my days off. On my off days I start drinking at noon. You don’t get to interrupt that.” Lest his insistence be mistaken for nothing more than self-assurance, Rust starts fidgeting, encouraging the officer leaving with his beer money to “hustle.” When he gets his beer, Rust is calm again, saying, “Thank you, boys.

²⁴ Rachel McAdams and Colin Farrell, “Night Finds You,” *True Detective*, season 2, episode 2, directed by Justin Lin, aired on HBO June 28, 2015 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2016), DVD.

²⁵ Matthew McConaughey, “Who Goes There,” *True Detective*, season 1, episode 4, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, aired on HBO February 9, 2014 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2014), DVD.

²⁶ Rachel McAdams, “Church in Ruins,” *True Detective*, season 2, episode 6, directed by Miguel Sapochnik, aired on HBO July 26, 2015 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2016), DVD.

We almost had a moment there.”²⁷ Season 2 begins to suggest what “a moment” might look like for a drinker in Rust’s condition. After sardonically promising her former partner to do a “fearless and searching moral inventory” (as Alcoholics Anonymous instructs its members to do), Ani’s wrist shakes while she uses a magnifying glass in the evidence room to which she has been demoted (and in which she is surrounded by a massive “inventory” of police evidence). Later, while reconnecting with Ray, Ani tells him she’s “drinking more. My hands get fucked up. Shake-like.”²⁸

For all the disappointment fans and critics express about the changes made to *True Detective* in season 2, the parallels between Rust Cohle and Ani Bezzerides are striking. That Bezzerides takes over so ably for a celebrated heavy-drinking hard-boiled masculine character does not necessarily make her a better, or more important, feminist detective than those who came before her. And since viewers were unimpressed by so much of season 2, many seem to have missed the significance of Rachel McAdams’s stellar performance of the heavy-drinking hard-boiled detective role. Indeed, the internet still hums with excitement at Matthew McConaughey’s suggestion that he might reprise the role of Rust Cohle for a potential third season of *True Detective*, which would bury, for the time being, Rachel McAdams’ unique contribution to the show (and the genre) along with *True Detective*’s anthology structure.²⁹

²⁷ Matthew McConaughey, “The Long Bright Dark,” *True Detective*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga, aired on HBO January 12, 2014 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2014), DVD.

²⁸ Rachel McAdams and Colin Farrell, “Other Lives,” *True Detective*, season 2, episode 5, directed by John Crowley, aired on HBO July 19, 2015 (Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2016), DVD.

²⁹ See Katie Rife, “Matthew McConaughey is Still Down for *True Detective* Season 3,” *A. V. Club*, December 19, 2016, <http://www.avclub.com/article/matthew-mcconaughey-still-down-true-detective-seas-247674>.

But Ani Bezzerides disrupts the gendered semiotics at the heart of hard-boiled detective fiction in such a way that, if others follow her footsteps down these mean streets, the alcoholic symbolism of twentieth century hard-boiled fiction may become totally arcane for twenty-first century readers and viewers. Indeed, the failure of *True Detective* season 2 to hold viewers' attention and attract praise from critics already suggests that boozy Chandleresque visions of the corrupted public sphere mean little to viewers of contemporary American crime stories. At the same time, many fans of the show's first season were troubled by those "bad men" Rust Cohle claims "the world needs." Ani Bezzerides proves that, while a "fundamental difference the sexes" may exist, bad women are exceptionally good at keeping bad men from the door.

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